

GREAT SHORT STORIES

For
Matriculation Students.

Selected and Annotated

by
S. S. MATHUR, M.A.
Director of Education,
Delhi.

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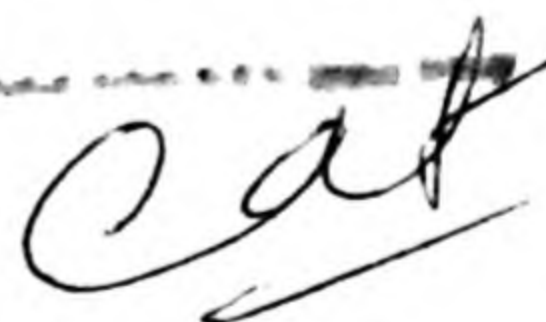
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INTRODUCTION

The Short-story has acquired great popularity and a special importance in modern times. It is not only that it takes a very short time to read and is thus found most convenient in the hurry and bustle of the present times, but it has been found to be more effective and for that reason more satisfying to the human mind than the longer tale. In its best form the Short-story has the same appeal as a lyric, and indeed the aim of the writer is to give a great thrill or a big emotional surge with narration which is short and yet most pithy. The writer would take just one incident in the life of a person and make it a climax of great emotional sublimity. With just a few strokes, with greatest brevity in narration, he is able to stir the heart and make a profound impression. That is just what a lyric poet would do. The aim and scope of the Short-story is very akin to lyric poetry.

It is important, therefore, to remember that the Short-story is not an abbreviated form of a long-story or a novel, but that it has a definite artistic form of its own and for that reason, stands in a class by itself.

The literary form to which the Short-story more accurately corresponds is the One-Act play. The scope and purpose of both are very

similar. There should be, so far as possible, a concentration on one important or interesting incident in the life of the main character of the story, and the situation has to be dramatic. At the hand of a master, the Short-story can portray character and lay bare the depths of the human heart.

Yet simplicity is the key-note of a good Short-story. The most effective stories therefore are those which have a universal appeal and rouse emotion. It is for this reason a great art, and a more difficult thing to write than a long story. It takes an artist to know what should be included and what left out. The writer has to concentrate on the incident or emotional experience round which the story has to be built up and he cannot afford to see things that lie about all round and do not concern him. A few incidents and details, a briefly-sketched back-ground, perhaps the suggestion of an atmosphere, a small group of persons—that is all.

Yet these few things are significant, full of human interest, and reflect human character and destiny in which we are chiefly interested. For man is so made that even in his simpler and more trivial actions his life and character are plainly revealed. The art of Short-story teller lies in presenting these actions in such a way as to bring out their meaning and significance; in other words, in presenting them in a *living* way. Thus presented, anything may be the subject of a Short-story. So long as it is made to afford us a

glimpse into a man's life or experience or character, or into anything that deeply interests man—it will be suitable subject for a short-story.

Take, for instance, master-pieces like Tagore's "*The Home-Coming*" or Gauri Shanker Joshi's "*The Letter*" or Mulk Raj Anand's "*The Lost Child*" and you would see how the simple hopes and sorrows of children or grown-ups can raise emotional storms, and become events of spiritual experience. The Short-story can produce excellent comedy too. The comedy of mistake or misunderstanding is very well brought out in the story of the "*Muscular Sin-in-Law*", so full of true human touches.

Thus the Short-story generally moves amidst the simple and common experiences of life, the faults and foibles, the little joys and sorrows that chequer man's life.

There are numerous anthologies of Short-stories, but very few where selection has been made with the idea of bringing together simple stories which are at the same time master-pieces of the art. Each one of the stories in this collection can be called a real jewel and can be held up as a perfect specimen. They make the heart throb with the joys or sorrows of the simple heroes of the stories, and brings us in tune with what Wordsworth describes "the still sad music of humanity".

THE HOME-COMING

By Rabindra Nath Tagore

Rabindra Nath Tagore (1860-1941). *The greatest literary genius that India has produced in modern times. As a poet he was a giant amongst the mighty, and world recognition of his genius came with the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. The versatility of Tagore is awe-inspiring: he was great as a Dramatist and he was a master of the art of the Short-story. A pioneer in many diverse cultural fields, he was also a leader in developing the Short-story as a medium of literary expression. Without doubt he is the best of Indian writers of Short-stories, and in this branch of literature he ranks with the greatest in the world. Several collections of his short-stories have already appeared in English translation. Among these, the best known are "Hungry Stones and Other Stories" and "Mashi."*

Phatik Chakravarti was the ringleader among the boys of the village. One day a plan for new mischief entered his head. There was a heavy log lying on the mud-flat of the river, waiting to be shaped into a mast for a boat. His plan was that they should all work together to shift the log by main force from its

place and roll it away. The owner of the log would be angry and surprised, while they would all enjoy the fun. Everyone supported the proposal, and it was carried unanimously.

But just as the fun was about to begin, Makhan, Phatik's younger brother, sauntered up without a word and sat down on the log in front of them all. The boys were puzzled for a moment. One of them pushed him rather timidly, and told him to get up; but he remained quite unconcerned. He appeared like a young philosopher meditating on the futility of games. Phatik was furious. "Makhan," he cried, "if you don't get up this minute, I'll thrash you!"

Makhan only moved to a more comfortable position.

Now, if Phatik was to keep his regal dignity before the public, it was clear that he must carry out his threat. But his courage failed him at the crisis. His fertile brain, however, rapidly seized upon a new manoeuvre which would discomfort his brother and afford his followers added amusement. He gave the word of command to roll the log and Makhan over together. Makhan heard the order and made it a point of honour to stick on. But like those who attempt earthly fame in other matters, he overlooked the fact that there was peril in it.

The boys began to heave at the log with all their might, calling out, "One, two, three, go!" At the word 'go' the log went; and with it went Makhan's philosophy, glory and all.

The other boys shouted themselves hoarse with delight. But Phatik was a little frightened. He knew what was coming. And he was not mistaken, for Makhan rose from Mother Earth blind as Fate and screaming like the Furies. He rushed at Phatik, scratched his face, beat him and kicked him, and then went crying home. The first act of the drama was over.

Phatik wiped his face, and sitting down on the edge of a sunken barge by the river-bank, began to nibble a piece of grass. A boat came up to the landing and a middle-aged man, with grey hair and dark moustache, stepped on shore. He saw the boy sitting there doing nothing and asked him where the Chakravartis lived. Phatik went on nibbling the grass and said: "Over there ;" but it was quite impossible to tell where he pointed. The stranger asked again. He swung his legs to and fro on the side of the barge and said: "Go and find out," and continued to nibble the grass.

But, at that moment, a servant came down from the house and told Phatik that his mother wanted him. Phatik refused to move. But on this occasion the servant was the master. He roughly took Phatik up and carried him, kicking and struggling in impotent rage.

When Phatik entered the house, his mother saw him and called out angrily: "So you have been hitting Makhan again?"

Phatik answered indignantly: "No. I haven't! Who told you that I had?"

His mother shouted : "Don't tell lies ! You have."

Phatik said sullenly : "I tell you, I haven't. You ask Makhan !" But Makhan thought it best to stick to his previous statement. He said : "Yes, mother, Phatik did hit me."

Phatik's patience was already exhausted. He could not bear this injustice. He rushed at Makhan and rained on him a shower of blows : "Take that," he cried, and that, and that for telling lies."

His mother took Makhan's side in a moment, and pulled Phatik away, returning his blows with equal vigour. When Phatik pushed her aside, she shouted out : "What ! you little villain ! Would you hit your own mother ?"

It was just at this critical moment that the greyhaired stranger arrived. He asked what had occurred. Phatik looked sheepish and ashamed.

But when his mother stepped back and looked at the stranger, her anger was changed to surprise. For she recognised her brother and cried : "Why, Dada ! Where have you come from ?"

As she said these words, she bowed to the ground and touched his feet. Her brother Bishamber had gone away soon after she had married, and had started business in Bombay. She herself had lost her husband while he was there. Bishamber had now come back to Calcutta and had at once made enquiries con-

cerning his sister. As soon as he found out where she was, he had hastened to see her.

The next few days were full of rejoicing. The brother asked how the two boys were being brought up. He was told by his sister that Phatik was a perpetual nuisance. He was lazy, disobedient, and wild. But Makhan was as good as gold, as quiet as a lamb, and very fond of reading. Bishamber kindly offered to take Phatik off his sister's hands and educate him with his own children in Calcutta. The widowed mother readily agreed. When his uncle asked Phatik if he would like to go to Calcutta with him, his joy knew no bounds, and he said: "Oh, yes, uncle!" in a way that made it quite clear that he meant it.

It was an immense relief to the mother to get rid of Phatik. She had a prejudice against the boy, and no love was lost between the two brothers. She was in daily fear that he would some day either drown Makhan in the river, or break his head in a fight, or urge him on into some danger. At the same time she was a little distressed to see Phatik's extreme eagerness to leave his home.

Phatik, as soon as all was settled, kept asking his uncle every minute when they were to start. He was on pins all day long with excitement and lay awake most of the night. He bequeathed to Makhan, in perpetuity, his fishing-rod, his big kite, and his marbles. Indeed, at this time of departure, his generosity

towards Makhan was unbounded.

When they reached Calcutta, Phatik met his aunt for the first time. She was by no means pleased with this unnecessary addition to her family. She found her own three boys quite enough to manage without taking any one else. And to bring a village lad of fourteen into their midst was terribly upsetting. Bishamber should really have thought twice before committing such an indiscretion.

In this world there is no worse nuisance than a boy at the age of fourteen. He is neither ornamental nor useful. It is impossible to shower affection on him as on a smaller boy ; and he is always getting in the way. If he talks with a childish lisp he is called a baby, and if in a grown-up way he is called impertinent. In fact, talk of any kind from him is resented. Then he is at the unattractive, growing age. He grows out of his clothes with indecent haste ; his voice grows hoarse and breaks and quavers ; his face grows suddenly angular and unsightly. It is easy to excuse the shortcomings of early childhood, but it is hard to tolerate even unavoidable lapses in a boy of fourteen. He becomes painfully self-conscious, and when he talks with elderly people he is either unduly forward, or else so unduly shy that he appears ashamed of his own existence.

Yet, it is at this age that in his heart of hearts, a young lad most craves recognition and love and he becomes the devoted slave of any one who shows him consideration. But

none dare openly love him, for that would be regarded as undue indulgence and therefore bad for the boy. So, what with scolding and chiding, he becomes very much like a stray dog that has lost its master.

His own home is the only paradise that a boy of fourteen can know. To live in a strange house with strange people is little short of torture ; while it is the height of bliss to receive the kind looks of women and never to suffer their slights.

It was anguish to Phatik to be an unwelcome guest in his aunt's house, constantly despised and slighted by this elderly woman. If she ever asked him to do anything for her, he would be so overjoyed that his joy would seem exaggerated ; and then she would tell him not to be so stupid, but to get on with his lessons.

This constant neglect gave Phatik a feeling of almost physical oppression. He wanted to go out into the open country and fill his lungs with fresh air. But there was no open country to go to. Surrounded on all sides by Calcutta houses and walls, he would dream night after night of his village home and long to be back there. He remembered the glorious meadow where he used to fly his kite all day long ; the broad river-banks where he would wander the livelong day singing and shouting for joy ; the narrow brook where he could dive and swim whenever he liked. He thought of the band of boy companions over whom he was despot ;

and, above all, thoughts of even that tyrant mother of his, who had such a prejudice against him, filled his mind day and night. A kind of physical love like that of animals, a longing to be in the presence of the loved one, an inexpressible wistfulness during absence, a silent cry of the inmost heart for the mother, like the lowing of a calf in the twilight,—this love, which was almost an animal instinct, stirred the heart of this shy, nervous, thin, uncouth and ugly boy. No one could understand it, but it preyed upon his mind continually.

There was no more backward boy in the whole school than Phatik. He gaped and remained silent when the teacher asked him a question, and like an overladen ass patiently suffered the many thrashings that were meted out to him. When other boys were out at play, he stood wistfully by the window and gazed at the roofs of the distant houses. And if by chance he espied children playing on the open terrace of a roof, his heart would ache with longing.

One day he summoned up all his courage and asked his uncle: "Uncle, when can I go home?"

His uncle answered: "Wait till the holidays come."

But the holidays would not come till October and there was still a long time to wait.

One day Phatik lost his lesson book. Even with the help of books he had found it very difficult to prepare his lesson. But, now, it became impossible. Day after day the teacher caned him unmercifully. He became so abjectly miserable that even his cousins were ashamed to own him. They began to jeer and insult him more than even the other boys did. At last he went to his aunt and told her that he had lost his book.

With an expression of the greatest contempt she burst out : "You great, clumsy, country lout ! How can I afford to buy you new books five times a month, when I have my own family to look after ?"

That night, on his way back from school, Phatik had a bad headache and a shivering-fit. He felt that he was going to have an attack of malaria. His one great fear was that he might be a nuisance to his aunt.

The next morning Phatik was nowhere to be seen. Search in the neighbourhood proved futile. The rain had been pouring in torrents all night, and those who went out to look for the boy were drenched to the skin. At last Bishamber asked the police to help him.

At nightfall a police van stopped at the door of the house. It was still raining and the streets were flooded. Two constables carried Phatik out in their arms and placed him before Bishamber. He was wet through from head to foot, covered with mud, while his face and eyes were flushed with fever and his limbs

were trembling. Bishamber carried him in his arms and took him inside the house. When his wife saw him she exclaimed: "What a heap of trouble this boy has given us! Hadn't you better send him home?"

Phatik heard her words and sobbed aloud: "Uncle, I was just going home; but they dragged me back again."

The fever rapidly increased, and throughout the night the boy was delirious. Bishamber brought in a doctor. Phatik opened his eyes, and looking up to the ceiling said vacantly: "Uncle, have the holidays come yet?"

Bishamber wiped the tears from his eyes and took Phatik's thin burning hands in his own and sat by his side through the night. Again the boy began to mutter, till at last his voice rose almost to a shriek: "Mother!" he cried, "don't beat me like that. Mother! *I am* telling the truth!"

The next day Phatik for a short time became conscious. His eyes wandered round the room, as if he expected some one to come. At last, with an air of disappointment, his head sank back on the pillow. With a deep sigh he turned his face to the wall.

Bishamber read his thoughts, and bending down his head whispered: "Phatik, I have sent for your mother."

The day dragged on. The doctor said in a troubled voice that the boy's condition was very critical.

Phatik began to cry out : "By the mark—three fathoms. By the mark—four fathoms. By the mark— -- ." Many times had he heard the sailors on the river steamers calling out the mark on the leadline. Now he was himself plumbing an unfathomable sea.

Later in the day Phatik's mother burst into the room like a whirlwind, and rocking herself to and fro from side to side began to moan and cry.

Bishamber tried to calm her, but she flung herself on the bed, and cried : "Phatik, my darling, my darling."

Phatik stopped his restless movements for a moment. His hands ceased beating up and down. He said : "Eh ?"

The mother cried again : "Phatik, my darling, my darling."

Very slowly Phatik's eyes wandered, but he could no longer see the people round his bed. At last he murmured : "Mother, the holidays have come."

II

THE LOST CHILD

By Mulk Raj Anand

Mulk Raj Anand *was born in Peshawar in 1907. In 1925 he won a research scholarship and studied philosophy in London and Cambridge, obtaining a Doctor's Degree. Apart from his written work as an art critic, his two most important novels are "Untouchable" and "The Coolie." Both of these deal with social problems, in which he is deeply interested. His Short-stories are few, but this exquisitely drawn picture of a lost child is one of his best known.*

It was the festival of Spring. From the wintry shades of narrow lanes and alleys emerged a gaily clad humanity, thick as a crowd of bright-coloured rabbits issuing from a warren, and entering the flooded sea of sparkling silver sunshine outside the city gates, sped towards the fair. Some walked, some rode on horses, others sat, being carried in bamboo and bullock-carts. One little boy ran between his parents' legs, brimming over with life and laughter, as the joyous, smiling morning, with its open

greetings and unashamed invitations to come away into the fields, full of flowers and songs.

"Come, child, come," called his parents, as he lagged behind, arrested towards his parents, his feet obedient to their call, his eyes still lingering on the receding toys. As he came to where they had stopped to wait for him, he could not suppress the desire of his heart, even though he well knew the old, cold stare of refusal in their eyes.

"I want that toy," he pleaded.

His father looked at him red-eyed in his familiar tyrant's way. His mother, melted by the free spirit of the day, was tender, and giving him her finger to catch, said :

"Look, child, what is before you."

The faint disgust of the child's unfulfilled desire had hardly been quelled in the heavy, pouting sob of a breath, "M-o-th-e-r," when the pleasure of what was before him filled his eager eyes. They had left the dusty road on which they had walked so far to wend its weary way circuitously to the north, and had entered a footpath in a field.

It was a flowering mustard-field, pale, like melting gold, as it swept across miles and miles of even land, a river of yellow light, ebbing and falling with each fresh eddy of wild wind, and straying at places into broad, rich tributary streams, yet running in a constant sunny sweep towards the distant mirage of an ocean of silver

light. Where it ended, on a side stood a dense group of low, mud-walled houses put into relief both by the lower forms of a denser crowd of yellow-robed men and women and by high-pitched sequence of whistling, creaking, squeaking, roaring, humming noises that rose from it, across the groves, to the blue-throated sky like the weird, strange sound of Siva's mad laughter.

The child looked up to his father and mother, saturated with the shrill joy and wonder of this vast glory, and feeling that they, too, wore the evidence of this pure delight in their faces, left the footpath and plunged headlong into the field, prancing like a young colt, his small feet chiming with the fitful gust of wind that came winnowing from the fragrance of more distant fields.

A group of dragon-flies were bustling about on their gauzy, purple wings, intercepting the flight of a lone black bee or butterfly in search of sweet perfume from the hearts of flowers. The child followed them in the air, with his gaze, till one of them would fold its wings and sit down, and he would try to catch it. But it would go, fluttering, flapping, hovering in the air, when he had almost caught it in his hands. One bold black bee, having evaded capture, sought to tempt him by whining round his ear, and nearly settled on his lips, when his mother made a cautionary call :

"Come, child, come ; come on the footpath."

He went towards his parents gaily, and walked abreast of them for a while, being, how-

ever, soon left behind, attracted by the little insects and worms along the footpath that were coming out teeming from their hiding-places to enjoy the sunshine.

"Come, child, come," his parents called from the shade of a grove where they had seated themselves on the edge of a well. He ran towards them.

An old banyan tree here outstretched its powerful arms over the blossoming jack and Jaman and neem and champak and serisha, and cast its shadows across beds of golden cassis and crimson gulmohur, as an old grandmother spreads her skirt over her young ones. The blushing blossoms freely offered their adoration to the Sun, however, in spite of their protecting chaperon, by half uncovering themselves ; and the sweet perfume of their pollen mingled with the soft, cool breeze that came and went in little puffs, only to be wafted aloft by a stronger gush.

A shower of young flowers fell upon the child as he entered the grove, and, forgetting his parents, he began to gather the raining petals in his hands, but lo ! he heard the cooing of the doves and ran towards his parents, shouting : "The dove ! The dove !" The raining petals dropped from his forgotten hands. A curious look was in his parents' faces, till a koel struck out a note of love and released their pent-up souls

"Come, child, come," they called to the child, who had now gone running in a wild caper

round the banyan tree and, gathering him, they took the narrow, winding footpath which led to the fair from the mustard-fields.

As they neared the village, the child could see many other footpaths full of throngs, converging to the whirlpool of the fair, and felt at once repelled and fascinated by the confusion of the world he was entering.

A sweetmeat-seller hawked, "Gulab-jaman, rasgula, burfi, jalebi," at the corner of the entrance, and a crowd passed round his counter at the foot of an architecture of many coloured sweets, decorated with leaves of silver and gold. The child stared open-eyed, and his mouth watered for the burfi that was his favourite sweet. "I want that burfi," he slowly murmured. But he half knew as he made the request that it would not be heeded, because his parents would say he was greedy. So, without waiting for an answer, he moved on.

A flower-seller hawked, "A garland of gulmohur, a garland of gulmohur." The child seemed irresistibly drawn by the implacable sweetness of the scents that came floating on the wings of the languid air. He went towards the basket where the flowers lay heaped and half murmured, "I want that garland," but he well knew his parents would refuse to buy him these flowers because they would say they were cheap. So, without waiting for an answer, he moved on.

A man stood holding a pole with yellow, red, green and purple balloons flying from it.

The child was simply carried away by the rainbow glory of their silken colours, and he was possessed by an overwhelming desire to possess them all. But he well knew his parents would never buy him the balloons, because they would say he was too old to play with such toys. So he walked on farther.

A juggler stood playing a flute to a snake which coiled itself in a basket, its head raised in a graceful bend like the neck of a swan, while the music stole into its invisible ears like the gentle rippling of a miniature water-fall. The child went towards the juggler. But knowing his parents had forbidden him to hear such coarse music as the jugglers play, he proceeded farther.

There was a roundabout in full swing. Men, women and children, carried in a whirling motion, shrieked and cried with dizzy laughter. The child watched them intently going round and round, a pink blush of a smile on his face, his eyes rippling with the same movement, his lips half parted in amaze, till he felt he himself was being carried round. The ring seemed to go fiercely at first, then gradually it began to move less fast. Presently, the child, rapt, his finger in his mouth, beheld it stop. This time, before his over-powering love of his anticipated sensation of movement was chilled by the fact of his parent's eternal denial, he made a bold request: "I want to go on the roundabout, please, father, mother."

There was no reply. He turned to look at

his parents. They were not there, ahead of him. He turned to look on the sides. They were not there. He looked behind. There was no sign of them.

A full, deep cry arose within his dry throat, and with a sudden jerk of his body he ran from where he stood, crying in red fear, "Mother, father." Tears rained down from his eyes, heavy and fierce, his flushed face was convulsed with fear. Panic-stricken, he ran to one side first, then to the other, before and aft, in all directions, knowing not where to go. "Mother, father," he wailed, with a moist, shrill breath now, his throat being wet with the swallowing of his spittle. His yellow turban became untied and his clothes, wet with perspiration, became muddy where the dust had mixed with the sweat of his body. His light frame seemed heavy as a mass of lead.

Having run to and fro in a sheer rage of running for a while, he stood defeated, his cries suppressed into sobs. At little distances on the green grass he could see, through his filmy eyes, men and women talking. He tried to look intensively among the patches of bright yellow clothes, but there was no sign of his father and mother among these people, who seemed to laugh and talk just for the sake of laughing and talking. He ran hotly again, this time to a shrine to which people seemed to be crowding. Every little inch of space here was congested with men, but he ran through people's legs, his little sob lingering, "Mother,

father." Near the entrance of the temple, however, the crowd became very thick : men jostled each other heavy men, with flashing, murderous eyes and hefty shoulders. The poor child struggled to carve a way between their feet, but, knocked to and fro by their brutal paws, he might have been trampled underfoot, had he not shrieked at the highest pitch of his voice, "F-ather, mother." A man in the surging crowd heard his groan, and, stooping with very great difficulty, lifted him up in his arms.

"How did you get here, child ? Whose baby are you ?" the man asked as he steered clear of the mass.

The child wept more bitterly than ever now, and only cried, "I want my mother, I want my father."

The man tried to soothe him by taking him up to the roundabout. "Will you have a lift on the horses ?" he gently asked as he approached the ring.

The child's throat tore into a thousand shrill sobs and he only shouted, "I want my mother, I want my father."

The man headed towards the place where the juggler still played on the flute to the dancing cobra.

"Listen to that nice music, child," he pleaded.

But the child shut his ears with his fingers and shouted his double-pitched strain, "I want my mother, I want my father."

The man took him near the balloons, thinking the bright colours of the balls would distract the child's attention and quieten him. "Would you like a rainbow-coloured balloon?" he persuasively asked.

But the child turned his eyes from the flying balloons and just sobbed, "I want my mother, I want my father."

The man, still importunate in his kindly desire to make the child happy, bore him to the gate where the flower-seller stood. "Look! Can you smell these nice flowers, child? Would you like a garland to put round your neck?"

The child turned his nose away from the basket and reiterated his sob, "I want my mother, I want my father."

Thinking to humour his disconsolate find by a gift of sweets, the man took him to the counter of the sweet-shop. "What sweets would you like, child?" he asked.

The child turned his face from the sweet-shop and only sobbed, "I want my mother, I want my father."

III

THE LETTER

By Gaurishanker Joshi

Gaurishankar Joshi (born 1892)—*Not much is known about him. His excellent story "The Letter" was first published by Oxford University Press in a book called "Ten Tales" in 1931, and since then Gaurishankar Joshi has been regarded as one of India's most promising writers of Short-stories.*

In the grey sky of early dawn stars still glowed, as happy memories light up a life that is nearing its close. An old man was walking through the town, now and again drawing his tattered cloak tighter to shield his body from the cold and biting wind. From some houses standing apart came the sound of grinding mills and the sweet voices of women singing at their work, and these sounds helped him along his lonely way. Except for the occasional bark of a dog, the distant steps of a workman going early to work, or the screech of a bird disturbed before its time, the whole town was wrapped in deathly silence. Most of its inhabitants were still in the arms of sleep, a sleep which grew

more and more profound on account of the intense winter cold ; for the cold used sleep to extend its sway over all things even as a false friend lulls his chosen victim with caressing smiles. The old man, shivering at times but fixed of purpose, plodded on till he came out of the town-gate on to a straight road. Along this he now went at a somewhat slower pace, supporting himself on his old staff.

On one side of the road was a row of trees, on the other the town's public garden. The night was darker now and the cold more intense, for the wind was blowing straight along the road, and on it there only fell, like frozen snow, the faint light of the morning star. At the end of the garden stood a handsome building of the newest style, and light gleamed through the crevices of its closed doors and windows.

Beholding the wooden arch of this building, the old man was filled with the joy that the pilgrim feels when he first sees the goal of his journey. On the arch hung an old board with the newly painted letters : POST OFFICE. The old man went in quietly and squatted on the veranda. The voices of two or three people busy at their routine work could be heard faintly through the wall.

'Police Superintendent', a voice inside called sharply. The old man started at the sound, but composed himself again to wait. But for the faith and love that warmed him he could not have borne the bitter cold.

Name after name rang out from within as the clerk read out the English addresses on the letters and flung them to the waiting postmen. From long practice he had acquired great speed in reading out the titles—Commissioner, Superintendent, Diwan Sahib, Librarian—and in flinging the letters out.

In the midst of this procedure a jesting voice from inside called, 'Coachman Ali !'

The old man got up, raised his eyes to Heaven in gratitude and, stepping forward, put his hand on the door.

'Gokul Bhai !'

'Yes. Who's there ?'

'You called out Coachman Ali's name, didn't you ? Here I am. I have come for my letter.'

'It is a madman, sir, who worries us by calling every day for letters that never come,' said the clerk to the postmaster.

The old man went back slowly to the bench on which he had been accustomed to sit for five long years.

Ali had once been a clever shikari. As his skill increased so did his love for the hunt, till at last it was as impossible for him to pass a day without it as it is for the opium-eater to forgo his daily potion. When Ali sighted the earth-brown partridge, almost invisible to other eyes, the poor bird, they said, was as good as in his bag. His sharp eyes saw the hare crouching in

its form. When even the dogs failed to see the creature cunningly hidden in the yellow-brown scrub, Ali's eagle eyes would catch sight of its ears; and in another moment it was dead. Besides this, he would often go out with his friends, the fishermen

But when the evening of his life was drawing in, he left his old ways and suddenly took a new turn. His only child, Miriam, married and left him. She went off with a soldier to his regiment in the Punjab, and for the last five years he had had no news of this daughter for whose sake alone he dragged on a cheerless existence. Now he understood the meaning of love and separation. He could no longer enjoy the sportsman's pleasure and laugh at the bewildered terror of the young partridges bereft of their parents.

Although the hunter's instinct was in his very blood and bones, such a loneliness had come into his life since the day that Miriam had gone away that now, forgetting his sport, he would become lost in admiration of the green corn-fields. He reflected deeply and came to the conclusion that the whole universe is built up through love and that the grief of separation is unescapable. And seeing this, he sat down under a tree and wept bitterly. From that day he had risen each morning at four o'clock to walk to the post-office. In his whole life he had never received a letter, but with a devout serenity born of hope and faith he continued and was always the first to arrive.

The post office, one of the most uninteresting buildings in the world, became his place of pilgrimage. He always occupied a particular seat in a particular corner of the building, and when people got to know his habit they laughed at him. The postmen began to make game of him. Even though there was no letter for him they would call out his name for the fun of seeing him jump up and come to the door. But with boundless faith and infinite patience he came every day, and went away empty-handed.

While Ali waited, peons would come for their firms' letters, and he would hear them discussing their masters' scandals. These smart young peons in their spotless turbans and creaking shoes were always eager to express themselves. Meanwhile the door would be thrown open and the postmaster, a man with a head as sad and inexpressive as a pumpkin, would be seen sitting on his chair inside. There was no glimmer of animation in his features; and such men usually prove to be village schoolmasters, office clerks, or postmasters.

One day he was there as usual, and did not move from his seat when the door was opened.

'Police Commissioner!' the clerk called out, and a young fellow stepped forward briskly for the letters.

'Superintendent!' Another peon came; and so the clerk, like a worshipper of Vishnu, repeated his customary thousand names.

At last they had all gone. Ali too got up and, saluting the post office as though it housed some precious relic, went off, a pitiable figure, a century behind his time.

‘That fellow,’ asked the postmaster, ‘is he mad?’

‘Who, sir? Ali? Oh, yes,’ answered the clerk. ‘No matter what sort of weather, he has been here every day for the last five years. But he doesn’t get many letters.’

‘I can well understand that! Who does he think will have time to write a letter every day?’

‘But he’s a bit touched, sir. In the old days he committed many sins; and maybe he shed blood within some sacred precincts and is paying for it now,’ the postman added in support of his statement.

‘Madmen are strange people,’ the postmaster said.

‘Yes. Once I saw a madman in Ahmedabad who did absolutely nothing but make little heaps of dust. And another had a habit of going every day to the river-bed in order to pour water on a certain stone.’

‘Oh, that’s nothing,’ chimed in another. ‘I knew one madman, who paced up and down all day long, another who never ceased declaiming poetry, and a third who would slap himself on the cheek and then begin to cry out because he was being beaten.’

And everyone in the post-office began talking of lunacy. All working-class people have the habit of taking periodic rests by joining in general discussion for a few minutes. After listening a little, the postmaster got up and said:

'It seems as though the mad live in a world of their own making. To them, perhaps, we too appear mad. The madman's world is rather like the poet's, I should think.'

He laughed as he spoke the last words, looking at one of the clerks who wrote indifferent verse. Then he went out and the office became still again.

* * * * *

For several days Ali had not come to the post office. There was no one with enough sympathy or understanding to guess the reason, but all were curious to know what had stopped the old man. At last he came again: but it was a struggle for him to breathe, and on his face were clear signs of his approaching end. That day he could not contain his impatience.

'Master Sahib,' he begged the postmaster, 'have you a letter from my Miriam?'

The postmaster wanted to get out to the country, and was in a hurry.

'What a pest you are, brother!' he exclaimed.

'My name is Ali,' answered Ali absent-mindedly.

'I know ! I know ! But do you think we've got your Miriam's name registered ?'

'Then please note it down, brother. It will be useful if a letter should come when I am not here.' For how should the villager who had spent three-quarters of his life hunting know that Miriam's name was not worth a pie to anyone but her father ?

The postmaster was beginning to lose his temper. 'Have you no sense ?' he cried. 'Get away ! Do you think we're going to eat your letter when it comes ?' And he walked off hastily. Ali came out very slowly, turning after every few steps to gaze at the post office. His eyes were filling with tears of helplessness, for his patience was exhausted, even though he still had faith. Yet how could he still hope to hear from Miriam ?

Ali heard one of the clerks coming up behind him, and turned to him.

'Brother !' he said.

The clerk was surprised, but being a decent fellow he said, 'Well ?'

'Here, look at this !' and Ali produced an old tin box and emptied five golden guineas into the surprised clerk's hands. 'Do not look so startled,' he continued. 'They will be useful to you, and they can never be so to me. But will you do one thing ?'

'What ?'

'What do you see up there ?' said Ali, pointing to the sky.

‘Heaven.’

‘Allah is there, and in His presence I am giving you this money. When it comes, you must forward my Miriam’s letter to me.’

‘But where — where am I to send it?’ asked the utterly bewildered clerk.

‘To my grave.’

‘What?’

‘Yes. It is true. To-day is my last day : my very last, alas ! And I have not seen Miriam, I have had no letter from her.’ Tears were in Ali’s eyes as the clerk slowly left him, and went on his way with the five golden guineas in his pocket.

* * * * *

Ali was never seen again, and no one troubled to inquire after him.

One day, however, trouble came to the postmaster. His daughter lay ill in another town, and he was anxiously waiting for news of her. The post was brought in, and the letters piled on the table. Seeing an envelope of the colour and shape he expected, the postmaster eagerly snatched it up. It was addressed to coachman Ali, and he dropped it as though it had given him an electric shock. The haughty temper of the official had quite left him in his sorrow and anxiety, and had laid bare his human heart. He knew at once that this was the letter the old man had been waiting for : it must be from his daughter Miriam.

'Lakshmi Das !' called the postmaster, for such was the name of the clerk to whom Ali had given his money.

'Yes, sir ?'

'This is for your old coachman Ali. Where is he now ?'

'I will find out, sir.'

The postmaster did not receive his own letter all that day. He worried all night and, getting up at three, went to sit in the office. 'When Ali comes at four o'clock,' he mused, 'I will give him the letter myself.'

For now the postmaster understood all Ali's heart, and his very soul. After spending but a single night in suspense, anxiously waiting for news of his daughter, his heart was brimming with sympathy for the poor old man who had spent his nights for the last five years in the same suspense. At the stroke of five he heard a soft knock on the door : he felt sure it was Ali. He rose quickly from his chair, his suffering father's heart recognizing another, and flung the door wide open.

'Come in, brother Ali,' he cried, handing the letter to the meek old man, bent double with age, who was standing outside. Ali was leaning on a stick, and the tears were wet on his face as they had been when the clerk left him. But his features had been hard then, and now they were softened by lines of kindliness. He lifted his eyes and in them was a light so unearthly that the postmaster shrank back in fear and astonishment.

Lakshmi Das had heard the postmaster's words as he came towards the office from another quarter. 'Who was that, sir? Old Ali?' he asked. But the postmaster took no notice of him. He was staring with wide-open eyes at the doorway from which Ali had disappeared. Where could he have gone? At last he turned to Lakshmi Das. 'Yes, I was speaking to Ali,' he said.

'Old Ali is dead, sir. But give me his letter.'

'What! But when? Are you sure, Lakshmi Das?'

'Yes, it is so,' broke in a postman who had just arrived. 'Ali died three months ago.'

The postmaster was bewildered. Miriam's letter was still lying near the door; Ali's image was still before his eyes. He listened to Lakshmi Das's recital of the last interview, but he could still not doubt the reality of the knock on the door and the tears in Ali's eyes. He was perplexed. Had he really seen Ali? Had his imagination deceived him? Or had it perhaps been Lakshmi Das?

* * * * *

The daily routine began. The clerk read out the addresses - Police Commissioner, Superintendent, Librarian--and flung the letters deftly.

But the postmaster now watched them as eagerly as though each contained a warm, beating heart. He no longer thought of them in

terms of envelopes and post cards. He saw the essential, human worth of a letter.

* * * * *

That evening you might have seen Lakshmi Das and the postmaster walking with slow steps to Ali's grave. They laid the letter on it and turned back.

'Lakshmi Das, were you indeed the first to come to the office this morning?'

'Yes, sir, I was the first.'

'Then how ... No. I don't understand...'

'What, sir?'

'Oh, never mind,' the postmaster said shortly. At the office he parted from Lakshmi Das and went in. The newly-waked father's heart in him was reproaching him for having failed to understand Ali's anxiety, for now he himself had to spend another night of restless anxiety. Tortured by doubt and remorse, he sat down in the glow of the charcoal sigri to wait.

IV

RESIGNATION

By Prem Chand

Prem Chand. *This is the nom de plume of one of the most significant modern writers in Hindi, Dhanpat Rai Srivastava, who died in 1936. His first collection of Short-stories entitled "Souz-e-Watan" (Patriotism) appeared in 1901, and was ordered to be burnt publicly by the District Commissioner on the ground of being seditious. Although his work is little known outside India, it has exercised a powerful influence over the younger generation of Indian writers. He is also one of the very well-known Indian novelists.*

The office clerk is a dumb animal. Frown at a workman and he will frown back, swear at a coolie and he will throw off his load, insult a beggar and he will find a way of making you feel small; even a donkey will kick up his hind legs if you torment him too long. But not the office clerk. Frown at him, snub him, insult him, hit him, he will bear it all in silence. He has a control over his feelings that even a Yogi cannot acquire after years of penance and self-control. He is a picture of contentment,

a paragon of patience, personification of loyalty, a model of respectfulness. He is a combination of all the virtues. In spite of this, fortune never smiles on him. Even the straw roof of a miserable peasant's hut has its turn of luck. On the Diwali night, the night of the Festival of Lamps, it is illuminated. It enjoys a shower of rain and takes pleasure in the sight of changing seasons. But the monotony of a Babu's life is never relieved. There is never a ray of light in his darkness. There is never the light of a smile on his face. Lala Fateh Chand was a member of this dumb species of humanity.

They say that the name affects the character to some extent. Now the name Fateh Chand means "The Moon of Victory," but from our hero's character it would be more appropriate to call him "The Slave of Defeat." He had failed in his office, he had failed in his private life, he was a failure among his friends, there was disappointment and defeat all around him. He had no son, but three daughters, no brothers but two sisters-in-law, and not a penny to fall back on. He was kind and generous by nature, which means that he was taken advantage of by everybody. On top of this his health was always poor. At the age of thirty-two his hair was like pepper and salt. His eyes were lustreless, his digestion ruined. His face was pale, his cheeks were sunken, his shoulders drooped. There was neither courage in his heart nor strength in his blood. He went to his office at nine in the

morning and returned at six in the evening. After that he never had the energy to leave the house. He had no idea what was happening in the world outside the four walls of his home and office. His present life and future life, his heaven and hell was his office. He had no interest in religion, none in entertainment, not even in sin. It was years since he had even played a game of cards.

It was winter. The sky was slightly clouded. When Lala Fateh Chand returned from his office at half-past five the candles had already been lit. As usual, he lay quietly on a charpoy in the dark room for about twenty minutes, before he could summon enough energy to open his mouth. He was still lying there when there was a noise outside. Someone shouted for him. His young daughter went out to look and reported that it was a peon from the office. At this moment his wife Sharda was scrubbing some utensils with ash before serving her husband's food. She told the girl : "Ask him what is the matter ? He is just back from the office. Why do they want him again ?"

The messenger replied : "The Sahib wants him. He says it's very important."

Lala Fateh Chand's forty winks were disturbed. He raised his tired head from the charpoy and asked. "Who is it ?"

"It's Chaprasi from the office," said Sharda.

"The Chaprasi ? Why does the Sahib want me ?"

"Yes, he says he wants you urgently. What sort of man is this Sahib of yours? He always seems to want you. Hasn't he had enough out of you all day? Tell him you can't come. The worst he can do is to take this wretched job from you. Let him!"

Fateh Chand muttered as if talking to himself: "I had finished everything. What does he want me for? It's funny." And then he shouted to the Chaprasi who was still standing outside the house: "I am coming" and got ready to go.

"Have something to eat. Once you start talking to the Chaprasi you'll forget everything else," said Sharda.

She brought him a bowl of lentil porridge. Fateh Chand had got up to go. When he saw this refreshment he sat down again, watched it hungrily for some time and then asked his wife, "Have the children had some?"

Sharda retorted angrily, as if she had been expecting this question: "Yes, yes! They have had their share. Now you eat some."

At this moment the youngest daughter appeared from somewhere and stood near by. Sharda looked daggers at her. "What are you doing here? Go and play outside," she said.

"Don't frighten the child," said Fateh Chand. "Come, Chunni, come and sit here. Have a little of this."

Casting a look of fear at her mother Chunni ran into the street.

Sharda said : "There's not much of it as it is. Not enough for you to start giving it away. If you give it to her the other two will be asking for it as well."

At this moment the Chaprasi again shouted from outside : "Babuji, it's getting late!"

"Why don't you tell him you can't come at this time of night?" said Sharda.

"How can I, when I depend on him for my livelihood?"

"You're letting him work you to death! Have you looked at your face in the mirror? You look as if you'd been ill for six months."

Fateh Chand ate a few spoonfuls of the porridge, quickly drank a glass of water and hurried away. He did not even wait for Sharda to finish a *pain* for him.

The Chaprasi said on seeing him, "You've taken a long time, Babuji. Now let us hurry. Otherwise Sahib will start swearing as soon as he sees you."

Fateh Chand tried to run for a few paces. Then he gave it up.

"He can swear if he likes," he said. "I can't run. Is he at his bungalow or at the office?"

The Chaprasi said : "Why should *he* be at the office? Is he a king or is he a clown?"

The Chaprasi was used to walking fast. Babu Fateh Chand on the contrary was used to walking slowly. But how could he confess this? He had a little pride left. He made

efforts to keep abreast, but it was no use. He felt a pain in his ribs and he could not breathe easily. His head swayed and his whole body broke into a clammy sweat. Fireflies flitted before his eyes. The Chaprasi warned him bullyingly : "Walk a bit faster, Babuji! You're too slow."

Fateh Chand had difficulty in speaking. "You get along. Tell him I'll be there presently."

And he sat down on a platform at the side of the road. He held his head between his hands and drew deep breaths. When the Chaprasi saw him like this, he said nothing and went on. Fateh Chand was afraid of what this devil might go and tell the Englishman. He got up with an effort and started again. A child could have knocked him down. Somehow he stumbled along and reached the Sahib's bungalow.

The Sahib was walking up and down in the verandah. He looked again and again at the gate and was furious to see nobody coming. When he saw the Chaprasi, he shouted : "Where have you been all the time?"

Standing on the steps of the verandah, the Chaprasi replied, "Huzoor, Fateh Chand took so long that I couldn't wait any longer. You can see I have run all the way back."

"What did the Babu say?" said the Sahib in his bad Hindustani.

"He's coming. He took nearly an hour

getting out of the house."

In the meantime Fateh Chand entered the spacious compound of the bungalow, came near and salaamed to the Sahib, bowing very low. The Sahib snapped at him: "Why are you so late?"

When Fateh Chand saw the Sahib's expression his blood ran cold.

"Huzoor, I left the office only a short while ago. But as soon as the Chaprasi called I left the house, as quickly as I could."

"You are telling a lie. I've been waiting here for an hour."

"Huzoor, I am not lying. Perhaps it has taken me more than the usual time to walk because I am not feeling very well, but I left the house as soon as the Chaprasi called for me."

The Sahib brandished the cane he was holding. He was obviously drunk. He shouted, "Shut up you swine! I've been standing here waiting for over an hour. Hold your ears and ask forgiveness."

Fateh Chand controlled himself as if he were swallowing blood. He said: "Huzoor, I worked to-day for more than ten hours in the office—I never....."

"Shut up, you swine! Hold you ears!"

"I have done nothing wrong."

"Chaprasi, you pull this swine's ears!" bawled the drunken Englishman.

The Chaprasi answered in a low but firm voice : "Huzoor, he is also my superior. How can I pull his ears?"

"Pull his ears, I say ! If you don't I'll thrash you !"

The Chaprasi replied : "Huzoor, I came to the office to serve, not to be beaten. I, too, have my self-respect. Huzoor can take my job from me. I am prepared to obey all your orders but I cannot lay hands on another's self-respect. I shan't keep this job for ever. I cannot make enemies with the world for its sake."

The Sahib could not control his anger. He rushed at the Chaprasi with his cane. The Chaprasi knew it was no longer safe to wait and took to his heels.

Fateh Chand stood silent, transfixed. When the Sahib could not get at the Chaprasi he came at him. He caught both his ears and shook him. "You swine ! You're insubordinate ! Go and bring the file from the office."

Fateh Chand said, nursing his ears, "Which file, sir ?"

"Which file which file Are you deaf ? I want the file Do you hear ?"

Fateh Chand mustered some courage and asked with some disgust : "Which file do you want ?"

He was at a loss. But he did not have the courage to pursue the question. The Sahib was

by nature a bad-tempered man, on top of that he was drunk with power, and on top of that he was drunk with whiskey. No one could predict what he would do next. So he started walking quietly towards the office.

“Run!” shouted the Sahib.

“Huzoor, I cannot run,” said the clerk.

“You’re getting lazy, are you? I’ll show you how to run. Run, will you? Run.” He kicked him from behind.

Fateh Chand was an office clerk, but he was also a human being. If he had had any strength he would not have borne so much indignity from a drunkard. But as it was, it was useless to resist. He ran out of the gate and reached the road.

Fateh Chand did not go to the office. The Sahib had not even told him exactly which file he wanted. Perhaps he was too drunk to think it necessary to mention it. He started walking home, slowly, because the pain and anguish of this unwarranted humiliation had put chains on his feet. It is true that the Sahib was much stronger physically, but could he not at least have given him a piece of his mind? Why had he not taken off his shoe and hit him on the face?

But there was really no help for it, he thought. The Englishman could have shot him dead. At the most they would give him a light sentence of a couple of months, or a fine of three or four hundred rupees. But *his* whole

family would be ruined. There was no one who would look after his children. Perhaps they would die of starvation in the streets. Oh, why wasn't he a bit richer? If he had even a little money to fall back on he would not tolerate this treatment. He wouldn't have minded being killed after he had given a proper lesson to that bully. He wasn't afraid for his own sake. There were no great pleasures in life he would be sorry to leave. Only his wife his children

He thought of all sorts of things as he went along. Why had he neglected his health so badly? He ought always to carry a knife. He ought to have slapped the Sahib on the face. Perhaps the Sahib's khansamas and other servants would have thrashed him till he was unconscious, maybe till he was dead. Then it would have got round that someone had really stood up against oppression. After all, he had to die some day, and he wouldn't be able to look after his family then. There would have been some honour in that kind of death. This last thought fired him so much that he turned back and took a few steps towards the bungalow, but then he faltered again.

Very likely the Sahib had left for his club. What was the use of inviting more trouble? What had already happened was enough.

As soon as he got back home Sharda asked: "Why did he call you? You are very late."

Lying down on his charpoy Feteah Chand said: "He was drunk; he abused me, the devil;

he insulted me. The only thing he kept on repeating was, 'Why are you late? He asked the peon to pull my ears.'

Sharda answered angrily, "Why didn't you hit him on the face with your shoe?"

Fateh Chand continued : "The Chaprasi is a good fellow ; he said quite plainly, 'Huzoor, I am not in your service in order to humiliate respectable people.' And then he salaamed him and went away."

"That really was brave of him. Why didn't you give the Englishman a piece of your mind?"

"But I did. I gave him more than a piece of my mind. He rushed at me with his stick. I took off my shoe, he beat me with his stick, I beat him with my shoe."

Sharda was thrilled. She said : "Really? His face must have been a sight!"

"His face looked as if somebody had been over it with a broom."

"You did well! If I was there I wouldn't have left him alive."

"Well, I've given him a beating but things won't be simple now ; I don't know what's coming. I shall lose my job, of course, and maybe I shall be put in prison as well."

Why should you be put in prison? Is there no justice in the world? Why did he abuse you? He hit you first, didn't he?"

"Nobody will listen to me. Even the judges will be on his side."

"Never mind. You'll see now, no English officer will dare to treat his subordinates like that."

"He might have shot me."

"Somebody would have seen him."

Fateh Chand said with a smile: "What would have happened to you then?"

"God would have looked after us. The biggest thing for a man is to keep his honour; if you lose your honour, you don't deserve to look after your children. Since you have beaten that devil, I am proud of you. If you had borne the insult silently, I would have hated to look at your face; maybe I would not have said anything to you, but in my heart I would have lost all respect for you.

In calm, cool voice Sharda went on: "Now, whatever the consequences are, I shall face them joyfully. Hey, where are you going? Listen, listen....."

Like a madman, Fateh Chand ran out of the house. Sharda kept shouting after him, but he did not reply. He was going towards the bungalow; no longer cringing with fright, but holding his head up with pride. There was iron resolution in his face. He was a changed man. Instead of that weak, lifeless pale office clerk, here was a man, an active, brave, strong human being, walking with a purpose. He first went to a friend's house and borrowed a good strong stick. Then he went on to the bungalow.

It was nine o'clock. The Sahib was at dinner, but to-day Fateh Chand did not wait for him to finish his meal. As soon as the khansama had finished serving the meal and gone back to kitchen he lifted the curtain and went inside. The room was flooded with electric light. The floor was covered with a carpet, so beautiful, so expensive that Fateh Chand had not seen the like even on the day of his marriage. The Sahib looked at him with furious eyes.

"Get out. Why have you come in without permission?"

Fateh Chand raised his stick and said: "You wanted the file; I have brought the file. Finish your meal and then I'll show it to you. Till then I shall sit here. Have a good meal, maybe it will be your last."

The Sahib was stunned. He looked at Fateh Chand with an expression half of fear and half of anger. He realised that the man was desperate. Physically, he was weak, but it was certain that he had come prepared to return a stone for a brick; no, not a stone, but iron. The Sahib was afraid. It is easy to beat a dog so long as he does not growl; but when he snarls back at you you lose your determination. That was exactly what the Sahib felt. So long as he knew that Fateh Chand would bear abuses and even kicks silently he felt tough, but now that he was in a different mood and was watching every one of his movements like a cat, the Sahib's resolution

failed him. He knew that one insulting word would bring a blow from that stick. True, he could dismiss him. True, he could even get him sent to jail ; but he knew that he could not escape scandal and trouble. So, like a far-sighted man, he became mild and diplomatic, and said : "My dear man, you seem to be annoyed with me. Why are you annoyed ? Have I said anything to upset you ?"

"Half an hour ago you pulled my ears and called me a damn fool a hundred times. Can it be that you have forgotten so soon, Sahib ?"

"I pulled your ears ! You must be joking. Do you think I am mad ?"

"The peon is a witness. And your servants were watching, too."

"When did I do all this ?"

"Only half an hour ago. You sent for me and then you pulled my ears and kicked me."

"Really ! The fact is, Babuji, I must confess that I was a bit drunk. The bearer gave me too much whiskey. I don't remember anything. My God ! Did I do that ?"

"If you had shot me while you were drunk, would I not have died ? If everything is forgivable to a drunkard then just now it is I who am drunk. And my decision is that you shall hold your ears and ask my forgiveness, and swear that you will not treat people again like that. Otherwise, I will teach you a lesson. And don't you dare to move. The moment

you leave your chair, I'll crack your skull. Now hold your ears."

The Sahib tried to laugh and said : "Well, Babuji you have a sense of humour, haven't you ? Well, if I have said something rude to you, please forgive me."

"Hold your ears, " said Fateh Chand, brandishing his stick.

The Englishman was not willing to go through this humiliating ritual so lightly. He jumped from his chair and tried to snatch the stick from Fateh Chand's hands, but Fateh Chand was prepared for this. Before the Sahib had left the table, he gave him one full blow on his bare head. The Sahib's skull started singing. For a minute he held his head in both hands and then said : "I shall dismiss you."

"I don't care. But to-day I shan't leave until you hold your ears and swear that you won't behave towards people as you behaved to me. And if you don't do it straightaway the second blow is coming." So saying he lifted the stick high.

The Sahib had not yet forgotten the first blow. He immediately put his hands on his ears and said : "There ! Are you satisfied now ?"

"You won't swear at people any more ?"

"No."

"If you ever do so, remember that I shan't be far away."

"I'll never swear at anybody," said the Sahib in his bad Hindustani.

"Good. And now I shall leave you. From to-day I am no longer your clerk. I shall send in my written resignation to-morrow, explaining that because of your bad manners I am not willing to serve under you."

"But why resign? I won't dismiss you."

"I don't want to serve under an ill-mannered bully like you any longer. That is why."

And having said this Fateh Chand left the room and with an easy mind started walking back home. He had a sense of true victory and personal freedom. Never in his life had he experienced such happiness.

(Translated from the Hindustani by Dr. Anand)

V

THE MUSCULAR SON-IN-LAW

Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyay

Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyay (born 1873). Not very well known as a writer, but he made a place for himself as a story-teller by his charming story "*The Muscular Son-in-Law*." This truly is a great story; it shows deep insight in human nature, and wondrous skill in shaping a grand comedy out of simple errors or misunderstandings of daily life.

Nalini was postmaster of Alipore.

The afternoon was advancing. Nalini sat restless in his office. It was the month of Aswin. The Pujas were ahead. He had asked for leave but there was nothing from the head office yet.

If the order came even by five o'clock he would leave for Allahabad by that day's Mail. That was where his father-in-law lived and it would be his first visit after his marriage. His purchases had been made, his trunks packed, everything was ready and he was waiting. But the leave-order had not yet come.

At four o'clock the telephone-bell rang—*ting, ting, ting*. Nalini caught up the receiver expectantly.

'Hullo?'

No, it was not his leave. It was only an inquiry about a money-order over which there was some trouble!

Disappointed, Nalini came back and flopped down into his chair. Presently he drew out a letter from his pocket and began to read. It was from his wife. He had read it several times before but he read it once more:

Most Beloved,

Your sweet letter has soothed my heart. Is the long separation going to end at last? My heart-bird is waiting eagerly for a sight of the moon of your face. It is two years that we have been married but not for a day have I had a chance of serving my husband. Hasten here as soon as you get your leave. Your suffering wife lives in hope. Mejdi arrived to-day from Dinajpur. How long will it be before you get leave? Can you start on the day of the *panchami*? Here then I take my leave. Remember me—forget me not.

Yours only,

Sarojini

Nalini turned it over and read it through. At last he put it back in his pocket.

Only a minute or two to five o'clock; the telephone began to ring.

Nalini put his mouth again to the mouth-piece of the receiver.

“Yes?”

II

Leave! Leave! Leave! Nalini had obtained two weeks' leave.

He badly wanted to go to Allahabad. He had a score to settle with 'Mejdi of Dinajpur.'

When Nalini was married he had a soft, round and flabby appearance. His cheeks were plump, his hands soft like butter. Kunjabala ('Mejdi') could not help making a few sarcastic hits. Somewhat adapting a few verses of Rabindranath she had recited—

Like the lily does he look,

‘Lily’ is his name,¹

For soft he is, soft, so soft,

Soft as is his name.

Nor more soft than loosely knit

The home of sloth his frame.

Like the lily does he look,

‘Lily’ is his name.

One word of ridicule stirs a man more than ten words of counsel. And when that word falls from the lips of a pretty woman and when that pretty woman is your sister-in-law it becomes a hundred times more deadly.

¹ ‘Nalini’ means a lily.

After his marriage Nalini had returned to Calcutta and his father-in-law had gone back with his people to his place of business., Allahabad. Nalini, however, had not been able to put out of his mind the sarcastic words of his clever sister-in-law.

One day on his return from the post-office, Nalini was reclining in an easy chair smoking, when a sudden resolve sprang up in his mind : he could if he tried remove the slur. He could make his limbs firm and strong as befitted a man. The very next day he went to the bazar and bought a pair of Sandow's dumb-bells and began to take regular exercise at home. He cut out from his daily fare sugar and milk and *ghee* and rice, and substituted for them bread and meat and eggs. After a year's practice his limbs had become quite strong. In order to add to the manliness of his appearance he gave up shaving his beard. He also practised shooting with a few *shikari* friends, going to the villages and trying his hand on ducks and boars.

Two years had gone by and now it was not the same Nalini. His forehead was free from fat, his chin was sharp cut, his arms and legs strong-boned. In fact he had become very unlike his name.

Now was the time to meet Kunjabala. If only he could change his name !

III

On the next day, at two o'clock in the afternoon, Nalini alighted at Allahabad station.

He wore loose drawers and a Punjabi long-coat and had a turban on his head. He carried a thick stick in his hand. Among his belongings there was a gun-case, for he intended to put in some shooting during his leave.

On getting down he looked around. No one had come to meet him. On the previous day he had sent off to his father-in-law a four-anna¹ telegram. Had it not arrived, then?

He called a coolie and came out of the station with his things. He asked a cabby, 'Do you know the house of Mohendra Babu, the Pleader?'

'Yes, Babu, come.'

Nalini got in.

In half an hour the cab drew up before a house with a large compound. In the verandah of the outer rooms a girl, about nine or ten years of age, was playing. Not far off was a well where an up-country servant was noisily scouring a cooking-pan.

Alighting from the carriage Nalini asked the servant, 'Is this the house of Mohendra Babu, the Pleader?'

'Yes, Babu.'

'Is he in?'

'No. He has gone to the house of Kidar Babu, the Pleader, for a game of dice.'

'Well, go in and say that the Jamai Babu has come.'

¹The concession-rate allowed to employees of the department.

Hearing this the girl who was playing in the verandah ran into the house and announced in a voice that rent the skies, 'Your Jamai Babu has come!'

The servant, whose name was Ramsharan, said with an expansive smile, 'Is it the Jamai Babu?' He then made haste to wash his hands, and made a low *salam* to Nalini.

Then he took down the luggage from the cab. In the meanwhile boys and girls of various shapes and sizes came out to have a look at the Jamai.

Ramsharan conducted Nalini to the sitting-room.

.....A girl came and offered a glass to Nalini, saying 'Jamai Babu, have a little sherbet.'

Nalini tasted it and found it to be salt water! He put the glass down. A practical joke!

A door in one corner of the room opened and Ramsharan drew aside the *purdah* and said, 'Babu, come, refreshments have been served.'

Nalini saw a room in the ladies' apartments. He entered. In the middle of the floor a pretty carpet seat had been spread. Before it in silver dishes, bowls, and glasses, were food and drink of many sorts. Nalini quietly sat down and turned his attention to the good things before him.

Presently there came from the next room the tinkling of anklets. A little girl came to the door and said, 'Mejdi is coming.'

Nalini understood. It was Kunjabala who was coming. He pulled up the sleeve of his right arm. She should see that his wrist was no longer round and fat.

The tinkling came nearer.

So you *did* think of us after so long! — With these words on her lips a young woman came in. But it was only for a moment. As soon as they had looked at each other she pulled down a cubit's length of her sari for a veil and rushed out of the room. Nalini saw it was not Kunjabala.

From the next room the excited voices of two or three women came to Nalini's ears.

'What is it? Why did you come away?'

'Save us! It is a stranger!'

'What sayest thou—a stranger?'

'What! Not our Sarat?'

'No. Why should it be Sarat?'

'Who is it, then?'

'Do I know?'

'What is all this? Is he an impostor?'

'From his muscular appearance I shouldn't be surprised if he were.'

A boy's voice was heard, 'He has brought a gun.'

‘What! We are ruined! Ramsharan! Ramsharan! Where art thou gone? Run and tell Babu.’

The sound of quick retreating steps; after that, silence.

In the meanwhile Nalini’s eyes fell on a book-case not far off. Ranges of bound ‘Law Reports’ were there with the name ‘M. N. Ghosh’ in gold letters at the bottom.

In a moment the whole affair became clear as daylight to Nalini. His father-in-law’s name was Mohendranath *Banerjee*. This gentleman was Mohendranath *Ghosh*. By mistake he had committed trespass on the house of another man’s father-in-law!

Nalini smiled to himself and quietly finished his meal.

IV

Ramsharan had run off with breathless speed to inform his master of what had happened. It was a holiday and several players had gathered together at Kidar Babu’s house. Mohendra Babu, senior, Mohendra Babu, junior (Nalini’s father-in-law) and other pleaders had met.

The game was in full swing when Ramsharan burst in upon them.

Seeing his master he cried out, ‘Babu! Babu! Come home at once!’

His looks were excited and the frightened Mohendra Babu asked, ‘What is the matter? Any one taken ill?’

‘A—robber—has—come—to—the—house!’

Everyone turned round with sudden interest.

Mohendra Ghosh said, ‘A robber! A robber in broad daylight!’

‘A robber—or an impostor—or a madman—no one knows what! He says “I am the Babu’s son-in-law.”’

Upon this there was a general burst of laughter. But Mohendra Ghosh asked, ‘When did he come? What’s he doing?’

‘He came about three o’clock. He has brought a big stick and a gun. He entered the inner apartments and took refreshments there. The ladies are very much frightened.’

‘He has brought a gun and a *lathi*? Rascal! In whose care didst thou leave the house?’—and Mohendra Babu rushed out like a madman.

Reaching home Mohendra Babu shouted—‘Where is the fellow?’

Nalini came out of the room to the verandah. Saluting the owner of the house he said, ‘Are you Mohendra Babu? I have to ask your pardon.’

Somewhat nonplussed, Mohendra Babu asked, ‘Who are you?’

‘My name is Nalini Kanta Mookerjee. I am the son-in-law of Babu Mohendra Banerjee. I gave to the driver the direction, “House of Mohendra Babu, the Pleader.” He brought me here! I realized my mistake only a little while

ago. I should have gone away. But a man had been sent for you, so I waited in order to ask your pardon before I went.

Mohendra Babu's anger dissolved. He caught Nalini's hand in his own and broke into long and loud laughter.

At last he said, 'There being two pleaders of the name of Mohendra Babu mistakes sometimes occur regarding clients. But this is the first time that there has been a mistake regarding sons-in-law.'

Then he sent for a hackney-carriage for Nalini and after a while Nalini departed in it to the house of his own father-in-law.

V

In Kidar Babu's house that afternoon interest lagged in the game after Mohendra Ghosh had left and wonderful stories of impostors were told by those present. By and by the gathering broke up.

Mohendra Nath Banerjee lived in the Shahgunj quarter. On returning home he called for tea and his *hookah*. Reclining on his easy-chair in the sitting room he sipped his tea. His servant placed a big *chillam* on the *hookah* and lightly fanned it with the *punkha* to make the fuel-balls light up. Having finished his tea Mohendra Babu put the pipe of his *hookah* in his mouth and shut his eyes in contentment.

Presently a hackney-carriage entered his compound. But it was a pleader's house and

many people came and went. So he was not disturbed. He only opened his eyes.

But he heard an unfamiliar voice outside :
'Is this Mohendra Babu's house ?'

'Yes, Babu.'

'Announce me Say that the Babu's son-in-law has come.'

Hearing the word 'son-in-law' Mohendra Babu started up from his chair. Holding up the screen of the window he looked out. There stood a muscular fellow with a big stick in his hand, and the driver was taking out a gun-case from the cab.

Mohendra Babu came shouting to the verandah : 'Is there any one there ?'

Seeing the look on his face poor Nalini did not know what to do.

Mohendra Babu shouted angrily, 'Rascal ! Impostor ! Get out from here ! Get out at once ! After making your round, have you come to my house ? Did you not find anyone else to claim as your father-in-law ? Rogue ! Ruffian !'

By this time the servants and *durwans* had arrived. Mohendra Babu said, 'Thrash him out of the house ! Take him by the neck and throw him out !'

The servants made as if to fall upon Nalini. Seeing this Nalini whirled his big *lathi* over his head and said, 'Take care ! I am going. But if anyone touches me I will pound his bones to powder !'

Seeing Nalini's attitude, and seeing his stick, the servants stood still, at their wit's end.

Addressing Mohendra Babu Nalini said, 'You are making a mistake. I am your son-in-law, Nalini.'

Hearing this Mohendra Babu flared up and said, 'Impostor! You know your father-in-law, do you? And do I not know my own son-in-law? Is my son-in-law a ruffian like you? Get out from here! Get out or I will send for the police!'

Without a word Nalini got into the carriage, and called out to the driver, 'Drive to the station.'

VI

After finishing his smoke Mohendra Babu went to the inner apartments.

His wife seeing him said, 'Have you lost your senses? You drove your son-in-law away?'

Mohendra Babu said gravely, 'Whom do you mean by "your son-in-law?" That fellow, was an impostor!'

'How do you know that he was an impostor?'

Mohendra Babu then recounted all that he had heard at Kidar Babu's house.

His wife said, 'Yes. But does that prove that he was an impostor? Both bear the same name. Is it so surprising that he may have mistaken the house and gone there?'

Hearing this from his wife Mohendra Babu's heart sank. At the sight of the *lathi* and the gun he had lost his head. He had not an opportunity to consider these things calmly.

After a pause he said, 'If it had been he, he would have sent us a message beforehand, we should have gone to meet him at the station. Does a son-in-law coming to his wife's people for the first time come like that—without a word sent? It was an impostor, yes, an impostor.'

'There was a likelihood of his coming. We knew that he was coming before the Pujas—though, of course, we were not informed of the exact date.'

Seeing her father thus beset Kunjabala said, 'He could not be Nalini. I saw him.'

Mohendra Babu said, 'Did you see him? Tell me, tell me, from where did you see him?'

'When the noisy scene occurred I went upstairs and looked out from the window. Our Nalini is like a doll made of butter. I saw a ruffianly, sturdy fellow.'

Mohendra Babu felt assured and said, 'True. I said so to his face. Do I not know my son-in-law? Does he look like a *goonda* of Kashi? He has the appearance of a soft, well-nurtured man. True, I saw him only for a day when the marriage took place—but could I make a mistake in such a matter?'

In the midst of this talk a servant came and said, 'Babu, a telegram has come!'

When Mohendra Babu read the telegram his face looked white and pinched. It was Nalini's four-anna telegram of the previous day.

His wife said, 'What is the news?'

Looking like a culprit and scratching his head Mohendra Babu said, 'Here is the telegram. He was really our son-in-law.'

His wife said, 'Then what can be done to bring him back?'

'Let me go and see what can be done. He told the driver as he drove away, "Go to the station." There is no train to Calcutta now. Probably he is waiting at the station. I'll go and try to bring him back with soft words ...'

Nalini, when he came back, did not allude to what had occurred. He saw that everyone was ashamed and sorry. That was enough. Only, one day, when someone was speaking of Mohendra Ghosh, the Pleader, he said: 'After all, the hospitable reception I found at the house of another man's father-in-law, many people do not find at that of their own!'

VI

THE HALF-BROTHERS

(By Elizabeth C. Gaskell)

Elizabeth C. Gaskell (1810-1865) was daughter of William Stevenson, a Unitarian minister. In 1832, she married William Gaskell, also a minister of the Unitarian Chapel, and her married life was one of calm and perfect harmony. In 1848 she published her first novel "*Mary Barton*," and in 1857, her remarkable "*Life of Charlotte Bronte*." These were followed by "*Wives and Daughters*" and several other novels, which have given her lasting fame as a novelist and writer of English prose.

"*The Half-Brothers*" is a pathetic story of the life of a boy—Gregory—who, after the death of his mother, is neglected and slighted by all. His magnificent sacrifice to save his half-brother's life makes him one of the noblest characters in English fiction.

My mother was twice married. She never spake of her first husband, and it is only from other people that I have learnt what little I know about him. I believe she was scarcely

seventeen when she was married to him ; and he was barely one-and-twenty. He rented a small farm up in Cumberland, somewhere towards the sea-coast ; but he was perhaps too young and inexperienced to have the charge of land and cattle ; anyhow, his affairs did not prosper, and he fell into ill-health, and died of consumption before they had been three years man and wife, leaving my mother a young widow of twenty, with a little child only just able to walk, and the farm on her hands for four years more by the lease, with half the stock on it dead, or sold off one by one to pay the more pressing debts, and with no money to purchase more, or even to buy the provisions needed for the small consumption of every day. There was another child coming, too ; and sad and sorry, I believe, she was to think of it. A dreary winter she must have had in her lonesome dwelling with never another near it for miles around ; her sister came to bear her company, and they two planned and plotted how to make every penny they could raise go as far as possible. I can't tell you how it happened that my little sister, whom I never saw, came to sicken and die ; but, as if my poor mother's cup was not full enough, only a fortnight before Gregory was born the little girl took ill of scarlet fever, and in a week she lay dead. My mother was, I believe, just stunned with this last blow. My aunt has told me that she did not cry ; Aunt Fanny would have been thankful if she had ; but she sat holding the poor wee lassie's hand, and looking in her

pretty, pale, dead face, without so much as shedding a tear. And it was all the same, when they had to take her away to be buried. She just kissed the child, and sat her down in the window-seat to watch the little black train of people (neighbours—my aunt, and one far-off cousin, who were all the friends they could muster) go winding away amongst the snow, which had fallen thinly over the country the night before. When my aunt came back from the funeral, she found my mother in the same place, and as dry-eyed as ever. So she continued until after Gregory was born; and, somehow, his coming seemed to loosen the tears, and she cried day and night, till my aunt and the other watcher looked at each other in dismay, and would fain have stopped her if they had but known how. But she bade them let her alone, and not be over-anxious, for every drop she shed eased her brain, which had been in a terrible state before for want of the power to cry. She seemed after that to think of nothing but her new little baby; she had hardly appeared to remember either her husband or her little daughter that lay dead in Brigham churchyard—at least so Aunt Fanny said; but she was a great talker, and my mother was very silent by nature, and I think Aunt Fanny may have been mistaken in believing that my mother never thought of her husband and child just because she never spoke about them. Aunt Fanny was older than my mother, and had a way of treating her like a child; but, for all that, she was a kind, warm-hearted

creature, who thought more of her sister's welfare than she did of her own; and it was on her bit of money that they principally lived, and on what the two could earn by working for the great Glasgow sewing merchants. But by-and-by my mother's eyesight began to fail. It was not that she was exactly blind, for she could see well enough to guide herself about the house, and to do a good deal of domestic work; but she could no longer do fine sewing and earn money. It must have been with the heavy crying she had had in her day, for she was but a young creature at this time, and as pretty a young woman, I have heard people say, as any on the countryside. She took it sadly to heart that she could no longer gain anything towards the keep of herself and her child. My Aunt Fanny would fain have persuaded her that she had enough to do in managing their cottage and minding Gregory; but my mother knew that they were pinched, and that Aunt Fanny herself had not as much to eat, even of the commonest kind of food, as she could have done with; and as for Gregory, he was not a strong lad, and needed, not more food—for he always had enough, whoever went short—but better nourishment, and more flesh meat. One day—it was Aunt Fanny who told me all this about my poor mother, long after her death—as the sisters were sitting together, Aunt Fanny working, and my mother hushing Gregory to sleep, William Preston, who was afterwards my father, came in. He was reckoned an old bachelor; I suppose he was long past forty, and

he was one of the wealthiest farmers thereabouts, and had known my grandfather well, and my mother and my aunt in their more prosperous days. He sat down, and began to twirl his hat by way of being agreeable; my Aunt Fanny talked, and he listened and looked at my mother. But he said very little, either on that visit, or on many another that he paid before he spoke out what had been the real purpose of his calling so often all along, and from the very first time he came to their house. One Sunday, however, my Aunt Fanny stayed away from church, and took care of the child, and my mother went alone. When she came back, she ran straight upstairs, without going into the kitchen to look at Gregory or speak any word to her sister, and Aunt Fanny heard her cry as if her heart was breaking; so she went up and scolded her right well through the bolted door, till at last she got her to open it. And then she threw herself on my aunt's neck, and told her that William Preston had asked her to marry him, and had promised to take good charge of her boy, and to let him want for nothing, neither in the way of keep nor of education, and that she had consented. Aunt Fanny was a good deal shocked at this; for, as I have said, she had often thought that my mother had forgotten her first husband very quickly, and now here was proof positive of it, if she could so soon think of marrying again. Besides, as Aunt Fanny used to say, she herself would have been a far more suitable match for a man of William Preston's

age than Helen, who, though she was a widow, had not seen her four-and-twentieth summer. However, as Aunt Fanny said, they had not asked her advice ; and there was much to be said on the other side of the question. Helen's eyesight would never be good for much again, and as Willian Preston's wife she would never need to do anything, if she chose to sit with her hands before her ; and a boy was a great charge to a widowed mother ; and now there would be a decent steady man to see after him. So, by-and-by, Aunt Fanny seemed to take a brighter view of the marriage than did my mother herself, who hardly ever looked up, and never smiled after the day when she promised William Preston to be his wife. But much as she had loved Gregory before, she seemed to love him more now. She was continually talking to him when they were alone, though he was far too young to understand her moaning words or give her any comfort, except by his caresses.

At last William Preston and she were wed ; and she went to be mistress of a well-stocked house, not above half-an-hour's walk from where Aunt Fanny lived. I believe she did all that she could to please my father ; and a more dutiful wife, I have heard him himself say, could never have been. But she did not love him, and he soon found it out. She loved Gregory, and she did not love him. Perhaps, love would have come in time, if he had been patient enough to wait ; but it just turned him sour to see how her eye brightened and her colour came at the

sight of that little child, while for him who had given her so much she had only gentle words as cold as ice. He got to taunt her with the difference in her manner as if that would bring love; and he took a positive dislike to Gregory—he was so jealous of the ready love that always gushed out like a spring of fresh water when he came near. He wanted her to love him more, and perhaps that was all well and good, but he wanted her to love her child less, and that was an evil wish. One day he gave way to his temper, and cursed and swore at Gregory, who had got into some mischief, as children will; my mother made some excuse for him; my father said it was harsh enough to have to keep another man's child without having it perpetually held up in its naughtiness by his wife, who ought to be always in the same mind as he was; and so from little they got to more and the end of it was, that my mother took to her bed before her time, and I was born that very day. My father was glad, and proud, and sorry, all in a breath; glad and proud that a son was born to him; and sorry for his poor wife's state, and to think how his angry words had brought it on. But he was a man who liked better to be angry than sorry, so he soon found out that it was all Gregory's fault, and owed him an additional grudge for having hastened my birth. He had another grudge against him before long. My mother began to sink the day after I was born. My father sent to Carlisle for doctors, and would have coined his heart's blood into gold to save her, if that could have

been ; but it could not. My Aunt Fanny used to say sometimes, that she thought that Helen did not wish to live, and so just let herself die away without trying to take hold on life ; but when I questioned her, she owned that my mother did all the doctors bade her do, with the same sort of uncomplaining patience with which she had acted through life. One of her last requests was to have Gregory laid in her bed by my side, and then she made him take hold of my little hand. Her husband came in while she was looking at us so, and when he bent tenderly over her to ask her how she felt now, and seemed to gaze on us two little half-brothers, with a grave sort of kindliness, she looked up in his face and smiled, almost her first smile at him ; and such a sweet smile ! as none except Aunt Fanny had seen. In an hour she was dead. Aunt Fanny came to live with us. It was the best thing that could be done. My father would have been glad to return to his old mode of bachelor life, but what could he do with two little children ? He needed a woman to take care of him and who so fitting as his wife's elder sister ? So she had the charge of me from my birth ; and for a time I was weakly, as was but natural, and she was always beside me, night and day watching over me, and my father nearly as anxious as she. For his land had come down from father to son for more than three hundred years, and he would have cared for me merely as his flesh and blood that was to inherit the land after him. But he needed something to love, for all that, to

most people, he was a stern, hard man, and he took to me as, I fancy, he had taken to no human being before—as he might have taken to my mother, if she had had no former life for him to be jealous of. I loved him back again right heartily. I loved all around me, I believe, for everybody was kind to me. After a time, I overcame my original weakliness of constitution, and was just a bonny, strong-looking lad whom every passerby noticed, when my father took me with him to the nearest town.

At home I was the darling of my aunt, the tenderly-beloved of my father, the pet and plaything of the old domestics, the 'young master' of the farm-labourers, before whom I played many a lordly antic, assuming a sort of authority which sat oddly enough, I doubt not, on such a baby as I was.

Gregory was three years older than I. Aunt Fanny was always kind to him in deed and in action, but she did not often think about him, she had fallen so completely into the habit of being engrossed by me, from the fact of my having come into her charge as a delicate baby. My father never got over his grudging dislike to his step-son, who had so innocently wrestled with him for the possession of my mother's heart. I mistrust me, too, that my father always considered him as the cause of my mother's death and my early delicacy; and utterly unreasonable as this may seem, I believe my father rather cherished his feeling of alienation to my brother as a duty, than

strove to repress it. Yet not for the world would my father have grudged him anything that money could purchase. That was, as it were, in the bond when he had wedded my mother. Gregory was lumpish and loutish, awkward and ungainly, marring whatever he meddled in, and many a hard word and sharp scolding did he get from the people about the farm who hardly waited till my father's back was turned before they rated the step-son. I am ashamed my heart is sore to think how I fell into the fashion of the family, and slighted my poor orphan step-brother. I don't think I ever scouted him, or was wilfully ill-natured to him ; but the habit of being considered in all things, and being treated as something uncommon and superior, made me insolent in my prosperity, and I exacted more than Gregory was always willing to grant, and then, irritated, I sometimes repeated the disparaging words I had heard others use with regard to him, without fully understanding their meaning. Whether he did or not I cannot tell. I am afraid he did. He used to turn silent and quiet; sullen and sulky my father thought it ; stupid, Aunt Fanny used to call it. But every one said he was stupid and dull, and this stupidity and dullness grew upon him. He would sit without speaking a word, sometimes, for hours ; then my father would bid him rise and do some piece of work, maybe, about the farm. And he would take three or four tellings before he would go. When we were sent to school, it was all the

same. He could never be made to remember his lesson; the schoolmaster grew weary of scolding and flogging, and at last advised my father just to take him away, and set him to some farm-work that might not be above his comprehension. I think he was more gloomy and stupid than ever after this, yet he was not a cross lad; he was patient and good-natured, and would try to do a kind turn for anyone, even if they had been scolding or cuffing him not a minute before. But very often his attempts at kindness ended in some mischief to the very people he was trying to serve, owing to his awkward, ungainly ways. I suppose I was a clever lad; at any rate, I always got plenty of praise; and was, as we called it, the cock of the school. The schoolmaster said I could learn anything I chose, but my father, who had no great learning himself, saw little use in much for me, and took me away betimes, and kept me with him about the farm. Gregory was made into a kind of shepherd, receiving his training under old Adam, who was nearly past his work. I think old Adam was almost the first person who had a good opinion of Gregory. He stood to it that my brother had good parts, though he did not rightly know how to bring them out; and, for knowing the bearings of the Fells, he said he had never seen a lad like him. My father would try to bring Adam round to speak of Gregory's faults and shortcomings; but, instead of that, he would praise him twice as much, as soon as he found out what was my father's object.

One winter-time, when I was about sixteen and Gregory nineteen, I was sent by my father on an errand to a place about seven miles distant by the road, but only about four by the Fells. He bade me return by the road whichever way I took in going, for the evenings closed in early, and were often thick and misty; besides which, old Adam, now paralytic and bed-ridden, foretold a downfall of snow before long. I soon got to my journey's end, and soon had done my business; earlier by an hour, I thought, than my father had expected, so I took the decision of the way by which I would return into my own hands, and set off back again over the Fells, just as the first shades of evening began to fall. It looked dark and gloomy enough; but everything was so still that I thought I should have plenty of time to get home before the snow came down. Off I set at a pretty quick pace. But night came on quicker. The right path was clear enough in the daytime, although at several points two or three exactly similar diverged from the same place; but when there was a good light, the traveller was guided by the sight of distant objects—a piece of rock—a fall in the ground—which were quite invisible to me now. I plucked up a brave heart, however, and took what seemed to me the right road. It was wrong, nevertheless, and led me whither I knew not, but to some wild boggy moor where the solitude seemed painful, intense, as if never footfall of man had come thither to break the silence. I tried to shout—with the dimmest

possible hope of being heard—rather to reassure myself by the sound of my own voice ; but my voice came husky and short, and yet it dismayed me ; it seemed so weird and strange, in that noiseless expanse of black darkness. Suddenly the air was filled thick with dusky flakes, my face and hands were wet with snow. It cut me off from the slightest knowledge of where I was, for I lost every idea of the direction from which I had come, so that I could not even retrace my steps ; it hemmed me in, thicker, thicker, with a darkness that might be felt. The boggy soil on which I stood quaked under me if I remained long in one place, and yet I dared not move far. All my youthful hardiness seemed to leave me at once. I was on the point of crying, and only very shame seemed to keep it down. To save myself from shedding tears, I shouted—terrible, wild shouts for bare life they were. I turned sick as I paused to listen ; no answering sound came but the unfeeling echoes. Only the noiseless, pitiless snow kept falling, thicker, thicker—faster, faster ! I was growing numb and sleepy. I tried to move about, but I dared not go far, for fear of the precipices which, I knew, abounded in certain places on the Fells. Now and then I stood still and shouted again ; but my voice was getting choked with tears, as I thought of the desolate, helpless death I was to die, and how little they at home, sitting round the warm, red, bright fire, wotted what was become of me—and how my poor father would grieve for me—it would surely kill

him—it would break his heart, poor old man! Aunt Fanny too—was this to be the end of all her cares for me? I began to review my life in a strange kind of vivid dream, in which the various scenes of my few boyish years passed before me like visions. In a pang of agony, caused by such remembrance of my short life, I gathered up my strength and called out once more, a long, despairing, wailing cry, to which I had no hope of obtaining any answer, save from the echoes around, dulled as the sound might be by the thickened air. To my surprise I heard a cry—almost as long, as wild as mine—so wild, that it seemed unearthly and I almost thought it must be the voice of some of the mocking spirits of the Fells, about whom I had heard so many tales. My heart suddenly began to beat fast and loud. I could not reply for a minute or two. I nearly fancied I had lost the power of utterance. Just at this moment a dog barked. Was it Lassie's bark—my brother's collie?—an ugly enough brute, with a white, ill-looking face, that my father always kicked whenever he saw it, partly for its own demerits, partly because it belonged to my brother. On such occasions Gregory would whistle Lassie away, and go off and sit with her in some outhouse. My father had once or twice been ashamed of himself, when the poor collie had yowled out with the suddenness of the pain, and had relieved himself of his self-reproach by blaming my brother, who, he said, had no notion of training a dog, and was enough to ruin any collie in Christen-

dom with his stupid way of allowing them to lie by the kitchen fire. To all which Gregory would answer nothing, nor even seem to hear, but go on looking absent and moody.

Yes, there again! It was Lassie's bark! Now or never! I fitted up my voice and shouted 'Lassie! For God's sake, Lassie!' Another moment, and the great white-faced Lassie was curving and gambolling with delight round my feet and legs, looking, however, up in my face with her intelligent, apprehensive eyes, as if fearing lest I might greet her with a blow, as I had done oftentimes before. But I cried with gladness as I stooped down and patted her. My mind was sharing in my body's weakness, and I could not reason, but I knew that help was at hand. A grey figure came more and more distinctly out of thick, close-pressing darkness. It was Gregory, wrapped in his maul.

'Oh, Gregory!' said I, and I fell upon his neck, unable to speak another word. He never spoke much, and made me no answer for some little time. Then he told me we must move, we must walk for the dear life—we must find our road home, if possible; but we must move, or we should be frozen to death.

'Don't you know the way home?' I asked.

'I thought I did when I set out, but I am doubtful now. The snow blinds me, and I am feared that in moving about just now, I have lost the right gait homewards.'

He had his shepherd's staff with him, and by dint of plunging it before us at every step we took—clinging close to each other—we went on safely enough as far as not falling down any of the steep rocks, but it was slow, dreary work. My brother, I saw, was more guided by Lassie and the way she took than anything else, trusting to her instinct. It was too dark to see far before us ; but he called her back continually, and noted from what quarter she returned, and shaped our slow steps accordingly. But the tedious motion scarcely kept my very blood from freezing. Every bone, every fibre in my body seemed first to ache, and then to swell, and then to turn numb with the intense cold. My brother bore it better than I, from having been more out upon the hills. He did not speak, except to call Lassie. I strove to be brave, and not complain ; but now I felt the deadly fatal sleep stealing over me.

'I can go no farther,' I said, in a drowsy tone. I remember I suddenly became dogged and resolved. Sleep I would, were it only for five minutes. If death were to be the consequence, sleep I would. Gregory stood still. I suppose he recognised the peculiar phase of suffering to which I had been brought by the cold.

'It is of no use,' said he, as if to himself. 'We are no nearer home than we were when we started, as far as I can tell. Our only chance is in Lassie. Here ! roll thee in my maud, lad, and

lay thee down on this sheltered side of this bit of rock. Creep close under it, lad, and I'll lie by thee, and strive to keep the warmth in us. Stay! hast gotten aught about thee they'll know at home ?'

I felt him unkind thus to keep me from slumber, but on his repeating the question, I pulled out my pocket-handkerchief, of some showy pattern, which Aunt Fanny had hemmed for me. Gregory took it, and tied it round Lassie's neck.

'Hie thee, Lassie, hie thee home! And the white-faced ill-favoured brute was off like a shot in the darkness. Now I might lie down—now I might sleep. In my drowsy stupor, I felt that I was being tenderly covered up by my brother; but what with I neither knew nor cared—I was too dull, too selfish, too much to think and reason, or I might have known that in that bleak, bare place there was naught to wrap me in, save what was taken off another I was glad enough when he ceased his cares and lay down by me. I took his hand.

'Thou canst not remember, lad, how we lay together thus by our dying mother. She put thy small, wee hand in mine—I reckon she sees us now; and belike we shall soon be with her. Anyhow, God's will be done.'

'Dear Gregory,' I muttered, and crept nearer to him for warmth. He was talking still, and again about our mother, when I fell asleep. In an instant—or so it seemed—there were many voices about me—many faces hovering round

me—the sweet luxury of warmth was stealing into every part of me. I was in my own little bed at home. I am thankful to say, my first word was 'Gregory!'

A look passed from one to another—my father's stern old face strove in vain to keep its sternness; his mouth quivered, his eyes filled with unwonted tears.

'I would have given him half my land—I would have blessed him as my son—Oh, God! I would have knelt at his feet, and asked him to forgive my hardness of heart.'

I heard no more. A whirl came through my brain catching me back to death.

I came slowly to my consciousness, weeks afterwards. My father's hair was white when I recovered, and his hands shook as he looked into my face.

We spoke no more of Gregory. We could not speak to him; but he was strangely in our thoughts. Lassie came and went with never a word of blame; nay, my father would try to stroke her, but she shrank away; and he, as if reproved by the poor dumb beast, would sigh, and be silent and abstracted for a time.

Aunt Fanny—always a talker—told me all. How, on that fatal night, my father, irritated by my prolonged absence, and probably more anxious than he cared to show, had been fierce and imperious, even beyond his wont, to Gregory; had upbraided him with his father's poverty, his own stupidity which made his

services good for nothing—for so, in spite of the old shepherd, my father always chose to consider them. At last, Gregory had risen up, and whistled Lassie out with him—poor Lassie crouching underneath his chair for fear of a kick or a blow. Some time before, there had been some talk between my father and my aunt respecting my return; and when Aunt Fanny told me all this, she said she fancied that Gregory might have noticed the coming storm, and gone out silently to meet me. Three hours afterwards, when all were running about in wild alarm, not knowing whither to go in search of me—not even missing Gregory, or heeding his absence, poor fellow—poor, poor fellow!—Lassie came home, with my handkerchief tied round her neck. They knew and understood, and the whole strength of the farm was turned out to follow her, with wraps, and blankets, and brandy, and everything that could be thought of. I lay in chilly sleep, but still alive, beneath the rock that Lassie guided them to. I was covered over with my brother's plaid, and his thick shepherd's coat was carefully wrapped round my feet. He was in his shirt-sleeves—his arm thrown over me—a quiet smile (he had hardly ever smiled in life) upon his still, cold face.

My father's last words were, 'God forgive me my hardness of heart towards the fatherless child!'

And what marked the depth of his feeling of repentance, perhaps more than all, considering

the passionate love he bore my mother, was this : we found a paper of directions after his death in which he desired that he might lie at the foot of the grave in which, by his desire, poor Gregory had been laid with OUR MOTHER.

VII

HOW MUCH LAND DOES A MAN NEED ?

By Count Leo Tolstoy

Count Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) was of noble birth, and heir to great possessions, but his own beliefs caused him to endeavour to renounce his wealth. The sincerity, the power shown in his writing brought him almost immediate fame, and though the Government of Imperial Russia censored his books, they dared not touch him personally. He is considered the greatest of Russian writers. His best known works are the novels "*War and Peace*" and "*Anna Karenina*."

An elder sister came to visit her younger sister in the country. The elder was married to a tradesman in town, the younger to a peasant in the village. As the sisters sat over their tea talking, the elder began to boast of the advantages of town life : saying how comfortably they lived there, how well they dressed, what fine clothes her children wore, what good things they ate and drank, and how she went to the theatre, promenades, and entertainments.

The younger sister was piqued, and in turn disparaged the life of a tradesman, and stood up for that of a peasant.

'I would not change my way of life for yours,' said she. 'We may live roughly, but at least we are free from anxiety. You live in better style than we do, but though you often earn more than you need, you are very likely to lose all you have. You know the proverb, "Loss and gain are brothers twain." It often happens that people, who are wealthy one day, are begging their bread the next. Our way is safer. Though a peasant's life is not a fat one it is a long one. We shall never grow rich, but we shall always have enough to eat.'

The elder sister said sneeringly :

'Enough ? Yes, if you like to share with the pigs and the calves ! What do you know of elegance or manners ! However much your goodman may slave, you will die as you are living—on a dung heap—and your children the same.'

'Well, what of that ?' replied the younger. Of course our work is rough and coarse. But, on the other hand, it is sure; and we need not bow to any one. But you, in your towns, are surrounded by temptations ; to day all may be right but to-morrow the Evil One may tempt your husband with cards, wine, or women, and all will go to ruin. Don't such things happen often enough ?'

Pahom, the master of the house, was lying on the top of the oven, and he listened to the women's chatter.

'It is perfectly true,' thought he. 'Busy as we are from childhood tilling mother earth, we peasants have no time to let any nonsense settle in our heads. Our only trouble is that we haven't land enough. If I had plenty of land, I shouldn't fear the Devil himself!'

The women finished their tea, chatted a while about dress, and then cleared away the tea-things and lay down to sleep.

But the Devil had been sitting behind the oven, and had heard all that was said. He was pleased that the peasant's wife had led her husband into boasting, and that he had said that if he had plenty of land he would not fear the Devil himself.

'All right,' thought the Devil. 'We will have a tussle. I'll give you land enough; and by means of that land I will get you into my power.'

II

Close to the village there lived a lady, a small land-owner, who had an estate of about three hundred acres. She had always lived on good terms with the peasants until she engaged as her steward, an old soldier, who took to burdening the people with fines. However careful Pahom tried to be, it happened again and again that now a horse of his got among the lady's oats, now a cow strayed into her garden, now his calves found their way into her meadows—and he always had to pay a fine.

Pahom paid up, but grumbled, and, going home in a temper, was rough with his family. All through that summer, Pahom had much trouble because of this steward ; and he was even glad when winter came and the cattle had to be stabled. Though he grudged the fodder when they could no longer graze on the pasture-land, at least he was free from anxiety about them.

In the winter the news got about that the lady was going to sell her land, and that the keeper of the inn on the high road was bargaining for it. When the peasants heard this they were very much alarmed.

‘Well,’ thought they, ‘if the innkeeper gets the land, he will worry us with fines worse than the lady’s steward. We all depend on that estate.’

So the peasants went on behalf of their Commune, and asked the lady not to sell the land to the innkeeper, offering her a better price for it themselves. The lady agreed to let them have it. Then the peasants tried to arrange for the Commune to buy the whole estate, so that it might be held by them all in common. They met twice to discuss it, but could not settle the matter ; the Evil One sowed discord among them, and they could not agree. So they decided to buy the land individually, each according to his means ; and the lady agreed to this plan as she had to the other.

Presently Pahom heard that a neighbour of his was buying fifty acres and that the lady had

consented to accept one half in cash and to wait a year for the other half. Pahom felt envious.

'Look at that,' thought he, 'the land is all being sold, and I shall get none of it.' So he spoke to his wife.

'Other people are buying,' said he, 'and we must also buy twenty acres or so. Life is becoming impossible. That steward is simply crushing us with his fines.'

So they put their heads together and considered how they could manage to buy it. They had one hundred roubles laid by. They sold a colt, and one half of their bees; hired out one of their sons as a labourer, and took his wages in advance; borrowed the rest from a brother-in-law, and so scraped together half the purchase money.

Having done this, Pahom chose out a farm of forty acres, some of it wooded, and went to the lady to bargain for it. They came to an agreement, and he shook hands with her upon it, and paid her a deposit in advance. Then they went to town and signed the deeds; he paying half the price down, and undertaking to pay the remainder within two years.

So now Pahom had land of his own. He borrowed seed, and sowed it on the land he had bought. The harvest was a good one, and within a year he had managed to pay off his debts both to the lady and to his brother-in-law. So he became a landowner, ploughing and sowing his own land, making hay on his own land,

cutting his own trees, and feeding his cattle on his own pasture. When he went out to plough his fields, or to look at his growing corn, or at his grass-meadows, his heart would fill with joy. The grass that grew and the flowers that bloomed there, seemed to him unlike any that grew elsewhere. Formerly, when he had passed by that land, it had appeared the same as any other land, but now it seemed quite different.

III

So Pahom was well-contented, and everything would have been right if the neighbouring peasant would only not have trespassed on his corn-fields and meadows. He appealed to them most civilly, but they still went on, now the Communal herdsmen would let the village cows stray into his meadows ; then horses from the night pasture would get among his corn. Pahom turned them out again and again, and forgave their owners, and for a long time he forbore from prosecuting any one. But at last he lost patience and complained to the District Court. He knew it was the peasants' want of land, and no evil intent on their part, that caused the trouble ; but he thought :

'I cannot go on overlooking it, or they will destroy all I have. They must be taught a lesson.'

So he had them up, gave them one lesson, and then another, and two or three of the peasants were fined. After a time Pahom's neighbours began to bear him a grudge for this

and would now and then let their cattle on to his land on purpose. One peasant even got into Pahom's wood at night and cut down five young lime trees for their bark. Pahom passing through the wood one day noticed something white. He came nearer, and saw the stripped trunks lying on the ground, and close by stood the stumps, where the trees had been. Pahom was furious.

'If he had only cut one here and there it would have been bad enough,' thought Pahom, 'but the rascal has actually cut down a whole clump. If I could only find out who did this, I would pay him out.'

He racked his brains as to who it could be. Finally he decided : 'It must be Simon—no one else would have done it.' So he went to Simon's homestead to have a look round, but he found nothing, and only had an angry scene. However, he now felt more certain than ever that Simon had done it, and he lodged a complaint. Simon was summoned. The case was tried, and re-tried and at the end of it all Simon was acquitted, there being no evidence against him. Pahom felt still more aggrieved and let his anger loose upon the Elder and the Judges.

'You let thieves grease your palms,' said he. 'If you were honest folk yourselves, you would not let a thief go free.'

So Pahom quarrelled with the Judges and with his neighbours. Threats to burn his building began to be uttered. So, though Pahom had more land, his place in the Commune was much worse than before.

About this time a rumour got about that many people were moving to new parts.

'There's no need for me to leave my land,' thought Pahom. 'But some of the others might leave our village, and then there would be more room for us. I would take over their land myself, and make my estate a bit bigger. I could then live more at ease. As it is, I am still too cramped to be comfortable.'

One day Pahom was sitting at home, when a peasant passing through the village, happened to call in. He was allowed to stay the night, and supper was given him. Pahom had a talk with this peasant and asked him where he came from. The stranger answered that he came from beyond the Volga, where he had been working. One word led to another, and the man went on to say that many people were settling in those parts. He told how some people from his village had settled there. They had joined the Commune, and had had twenty-five acres per man granted them. The land was so good, he said, that the rye sown on it grew as high as a horse, and so thick that five cuts of a sickle made a sheaf. One peasant, he said, had brought nothing with him but his bare hands and now he had six horses and two cows of his own.

Pahom's heart kindled with desire. He thought :

'Why should I suffer in this narrow hole, if one could live so well elsewhere ? I will sell my land and my homestead here, and with the

money I will start afresh over there and get everything new. In this crowded place one is always having trouble. But I must first go and find out all about it myself.

Towards summer he got ready and started. He went down the Volga on a steamer to Samara, then walked another three hundred miles on foot, and at last reached the place. It was just as the stranger had said. The peasants had plenty of land: every man had twenty-five acres of Communal land given him for use, and any one who had money could buy, besides, at two shillings an acre as much good freehold land as he wanted.

Having found out all he wished to know, Pahom returned home as autumn came on, and began selling off his belongings. He sold his land at a profit, sold his homestead and all his cattle, and withdrew from membership of the Commune. He only waited till the spring, and then started with his family for the new settlement.

IV

As soon as Pahom and his family arrived at their new abode, he applied for admission into the Commune of a large village. He stood treat to the Elders, and obtained the necessary documents. Five shares of Communal land were given him for his own and his sons' use: that is to say—125 acres (not all together, but in different fields) besides the use of the Communal pasture. Pahom put up the build-

ings he needed, and bought cattle. Of the Communal land alone he had three times as much as at his former home, and the land was good corn-land. He was ten times better off than he had been. He had plenty of arable land and pasturage, and could keep as many heads of cattle as he liked.

At first, in the bustle of building and settling down, Pahom was pleased with it all, but when he got used to it he began to think that even here he had not enough land. The first year he sowed wheat on his share of the Communal land and had a good crop. He wanted to go on sowing wheat, but had not enough Communal land for the purpose, and what he had already used was not available ; for in those parts wheat is only sown on virgin soil or on fallow land. It is sown for one or two years, and then the land lies fallow till it is again overgrown with prairie grass. There were many who wanted such land, and there was not enough for all ; so that people quarrelled about it. Those who were better off, wanted it for growing wheat, and those who were poor, wanted it to let to dealers, so that they might raise money so pay their taxes. Pahom wanted to sow more wheat ; so he rented land from a dealer for a year. He sowed much wheat and had a fine crop, but the land was too far from the village—the wheat had to be carted more than ten miles. After a time Pahom noticed that some peasant-dealers were living on separate farms, and were growing wealthy ; and he thought :

‘If I were to buy some freehold land, and have a homestead on it, it would be a different thing altogether. Then it would all be nice and compact.’

The question of buying freehold land recurred to him again and again.

He went on in the same way for three years: renting land and sowing wheat. The seasons turned out well and the crops were good, so that he began to lay money by. He might have gone living contentedly, but he grew tired of having to rent other people’s land every year, and having to scramble for it. Wherever there was good land to be had, the peasants would rush for it and it was taken up at once, so that unless you were sharp about it you got none. It happened in the third year that he and a dealer together rented a piece of pasture land from some peasant; and they had already ploughed it up, when there was some dispute; and the peasants went to law about it, and things fell out so that the labour was all lost.

‘If it were my own land,’ thought Pahom, ‘I should be independent, and there would not be all this unpleasantness.’

So Pahom began looking out for land which he could buy; and he came across a peasant who had bought thirteen hundred acres, but having got into difficulties was willing to sell again cheap. Pahom bargained and haggled with him, and at last they settled the price at 1,500 roubles, part in cash and part to be paid later. They had all but clinched the matter,

when a passing dealer happened to stop at Pahom's one day to get a feed for his horses. He drank tea with Pahom, and they had a talk. The dealer said that he was just returning from the land of the Bashkirs, far away, where he had bought thirteen thousand acres of land, all for 1,000 roubles. Pahom questioned him further, and the tradesman said :

'All one need do is to make friends with the chiefs. I gave away about one hundred roubles worth of dressing-gowns and carpets, besides a case of tea, and I gave wine to those who would drink it; and I got the land for less than twopence an acre. And he showed Pahom the title-deeds, saying :

'The land lies near a river, and the whole prairie is virgin soil.'

Pahom plied him with questions, and the tradesman said :

'There is more land there than you could cover if you walked a year, and it all belongs to the Bashkirs. They are as simple as sheep, and land can be got almost for nothing.'

'There now,' thought Pahom, with my one thousand roubles, why should I get only thirteen hundred acres, and saddle myself with a debt besides. If I take it out there, I can get more than ten times as much for the money.'

V

Pahom inquired how to get to the place, and as soon as the tradesman had left him, he prepared to go there himself. He left his wife to

look after the homestead, and started on his journey taking his man with him. They stopped at a town on their way, and bought a case of tea, some wine, and other presents as the tradesman had advised. On and on they went until they had gone more than three hundred miles, and on the seventh day they came to a place where the Bashkirs had pitched their tents. It was all just as the tradesman had said. The people lived on the steppes, by a river, in felt-covered tents. They neither tilled the ground nor ate bread. Their cattle and horses grazed in herds on the steppe. The colts were tethered behind the tents, and the mares were driven to them twice a day. The mares were milked, and from the milk kumiss was made. It was the women who prepared kumiss, and they also made cheese. As far as the men were concerned, drinking kumiss and tea, eating mutton, and playing on their pipes, was all they cared about. They were all stout and merry, and all the summer long they never thought of doing any work. They were quite ignorant, and knew no Russian, but were good-natured enough.

As soon as they saw Pahom they came out of their tents and gathered round their visitor. An interpreter was found, and Pahom told them he had come about some land. The Bashkirs seemed very glad; they took Pahom and led him into one of the best tents, where they made him sit down on some cushions placed on a carpet, while they sat around him. They gave him tea and kumiss, and had a sheep

killed, and gave him mutton to eat. Pahom took presents out of his cart and distributed them among the Bashkirs, and divided amongst them the tea. The Bashkirs were delighted. They talked a great deal among themselves, and then told the interpreter to translate.

‘They wish to tell you,’ said the interpreter, ‘that they like you, and that it is our custom to do all we can to please a guest and to repay him for his gifts. You have given us presents, now tell us which of the things we possess please you best, that we may present them to you.’

‘What pleases me best here,’ answered Pahom, ‘is your land. Our land is crowded, and the soil is exhausted; but you have plenty of land and it is good land. I never saw the like of it.’

The interpreter translated. The Bashkirs talked among themselves for a while. Pahom could not understand what they were saying, but saw that they were much amused, and that they shouted and laughed. Then they were silent and looked at Pahom while the interpreter said:

‘They wish me to tell you that in return for your presents they will gladly give you as much land as you want. You have only to point it out with your hand and it is yours.’

The Bashkirs talked again for a while and began to dispute. Pahom asked what they were disputing about, and the interpreter told him

that some of them thought they ought to ask their Chief about the land and not act in his absence, while others thought there was no need to wait for his return.

VI

While the Bashkirs were disputing, a man in a large fox-fur cap appeared on the scene. They all became silent and rose to their feet. The interpreter said, 'This is our Chief himself.'

Pahom immediately fetched the best dressing-gown and five pounds of tea, and offered these to the Chief. The Chief accepted them, and seated himself in the place of honour. The Bashkirs at once began telling him something. The Chief listened for a while, then made a sign with his head for them to be silent, and addressing himself to Pahom, said in Russian :

'Well, let it be so. Choose whatever piece of land you like ; we have plenty of it.'

'How can I take as much as I like ?' thought Pahom. 'I must get a deed to make it secure, or else they may say "It is yours," and afterwards may take it away again.'

'Thank you for your kind words,' he said aloud. 'You have much land, and I only want a little. But I should like to be sure which bit is mine. Could it not be measured and made over to me ? Life and death are in God's hands. You good people give it to me, but your children might wish to take it away again.'

'You are quite right,' said the Chief. We will make it over to you.'

'I heard that a dealer had been here,' continued Pahom, 'and that you gave him a little land, too, and signed title-deed to that effect, I should like to have it done in the same way.'

The Chief understood.

'Yes,' replied he, 'that can be done quite easily. We have a scribe, and we will go to town with you and have the deed properly sealed.'

'And what will be the price?' asked Pahom.

'Our price is always the same: one thousand roubles a day.'

Pahom did not understand.

'A day? What measure is that? How many acres would that be?'

'We do not know how to reckon it out,' said the Chief. 'We sell it by the day. As much as you can go round on your feet in a day is yours, and the price is one thousand roubles a day.'

Pahom was surprised.

'But in a day you can get round a large tract of land,' he said.

The Chief laughed.

'It will all be yours!' said he. 'But there is one condition: If you don't return on the same day to the spot whence you started, your money is lost.'

‘But how am I to mark the way that I have gone?’

‘Why, we shall go to any spot you like, and stay there. You must start from that spot and make your round, taking a spade with you. Wherever you think necessary, make a mark. At every turning, dig a hole and pile up the turf; then afterwards we will go round with a plough from hole to hole. You may make as large a circuit as you please, but before the sun sets you must return to the place you started from. All the land you cover will be yours.’

Pahom was delighted. It was decided to start early next morning. They talked a while, and after drinking some more kumiss and eating some more mutton, they had tea again, and then the night came on. They gave Pahom a feather-bed to sleep on, and the Bashkirs dispersed for the night, promising to assemble the next morning at day-break and ride out before sunrise to the appointed spot.

VII

Pahom lay on the feather-bed, but could not sleep. He kept thinking about the land.

‘What a large tract I will mark off!’ thought he. ‘I can easily do thirty-five miles in a day. The days are long now, and within a circuit of thirty-five miles what a lot of land there will be! I will sell the poorer land, or let it to peasants, but I’ll pick out the best and farm it. I will buy two ox teams, and hire two more labourers. About a hundred and fifty acres

shall be plough-land, and I will pasture cattle on the rest.

Pahom lay awake all night, and dozed off only just before dawn. Hardly were his eyes closed when he had a dream. He thought he was lying in that same tent, and heard somebody chuckling outside. He wondered who it could be, and rose and went out, and he saw the Bashkir Chief sitting in front of the tent holding his sides and rolling about with laughter. Going nearer to the Chief Pahom asked: 'What are you laughing at?' But he saw that it was no longer the Chief, but the dealer who had recently stopped at his house and had told him about the land. Just as Pahom was going to ask, 'Have you been here long?' he saw that it was not the dealer, but the peasant who had come up from the Volga, long ago, to Pahom's old home. Then he saw that it was not the peasant either, but the Devil himself with hoofs and horns, sitting there and chuckling, and before him lay a man barefoot, prostrate on the ground, with only trousers and a shirt on. And Pahom dreamt that he looked more attentively to see what sort of a man it was that was lying there, and he saw that the man was dead, and that it was himself! He awoke horror-struck.

'What things one does dream,' thought he. Looking round he saw through the open door that the dawn was breaking.

'It's time to wake them up,' thought he. 'We ought to be starting.'

He got up, roused his man (who was sleeping in his cart), bade him harness; and went to call the Bashkirs.

'It's time to go to the steppe to measure the land,' he said.

The Bashkirs rose and assembled, and the Chief came too. Then they began drinking kumiss again, and offered Pahom some tea, but he would not wait.

'If we are to go, let us go. It is high time,' said he.

VIII

The Bashkirs got ready and they all started; some mounted on horses, and some in carts. Pahom drove in his own small cart with his servant, and took a spade with him. When they reached the steppe the morning red was beginning to kindle. They ascended a hillock (called by the Bashkirs a shikhan) and dismounting from their carts and their horses, gathered in one spot. The Chief came up to Pahom and stretching out his arm towards the plain :

'See,' said he, 'all this, as far as your eye can reach, is ours. You may have any part of it you like.'

Pahom's eyes glistened; it was all virgin soil, as flat as the palm of your hand, as black as the seed of a poppy, and in the hollows different kinds of grasses grew breast high.

The Chief took off his fox-fur cap, placed it on the ground and said :

'This will be the mark. Start from here, and return here again. All the land you go round shall be yours.'

Pahom took out his money and put it on the cap. Then he took off his outer coat, remaining in his sleeveless under-coat. He fastened his girdle and tied it tight below his stomach, put a little bag of bread into the breast of his coat, and tying a flask of water to his girdle, he drew up the tops of his boots, took the spade from his man and stood ready to start. He considered for some moments which way he had better go—it was tempting everywhere.

'No matter,' he concluded, 'I will go towards the rising sun.'

He turned his face to the east, stretched himself, and waited for the sun to appear above the rim.

'I must lose no time,' he thought, 'and it is easier walking while it is still cool.'

The sun's rays had hardly flashed above the horizon, before Pahom, carrying the spade over his shoulder, went down into the steppe.

Pahom started walking neither slowly nor quickly. After having gone a thousand yards he stopped, dug a hole, and placed pieces of turf one on another to make it more visible. Then he went on; and now that he had walked off his stiffness he quickened his pace. After a while he dug another hole.

Pahom looked back. The hillock could be distinctly seen in the sunlight, with the people on it, and the glittering tyres of the cart-wheels. At a rough guess Pahom concluded that he had walked three miles. It was growing warmer; he took off his under-coat, flung it across his shoulder, and went on again. It had grown quite warm now; he looked at the sun, it was time to think of breakfast.

'The first shift is done, but there are four in a day, and it is too soon yet to turn. But I will just take off my boots,' said he to himself.

He sat down, took off his boots, stuck them into his girdle, and went on. It was easy walking now.

'I will go on for another three miles,' thought he, 'and then turn to the left. This spot is so fine, that it would be a pity to lose it. The further one goes, the better the land seems.'

He went straight on for a while, and when he looked round, the hillock was scarcely visible and the people on it looked like black ants, and he could just see something glistening there in the sun.

'Ah,' thought Pahom, 'I have gone far enough in this direction, it is time to turn. Besides, I am in a regular sweat, and very thirsty.'

He stopped, dug a large hole, and heaped up pieces of turf. Next he untied his flask,

had a drink, and then turned sharply to the left. He went on and on; the grass was high, and it was very hot.

Pahom began to grow tired: he looked at the sun and saw that it was noon.

'Well,' he thought, 'I must have a rest.'

He sat down, and ate some bread and drank some water; but he did not lie down, thinking that if he did he might fall asleep. After sitting a little while, he went on again. At first he walked easily: the food had strengthened him; but it had become terribly hot, and he felt sleepy; still he went on, thinking: 'An hour to suffer, a life-time to live.'

He went a long way in this direction also and was about to turn to the left again, when he perceived a damp hollow: 'It would be a pity to leave that out,' he thought. 'Flax would do well there.' So he went on past the hollow, and dug a hole on the other side of it before he turned the corner. Pahom looked towards the hillock. The heat made the air hazy: it seemed to be quivering, and through the haze the people on the hillock could scarcely be seen.

'Ah!' thought Pahom, 'I have made the sides too long; I must make this one shorter.' And he went along the third side, stepping faster. He looked at the sun: it was nearly half way to the horizon, and he had not yet done two miles of the third side of the square. He was still ten miles from the goal.

'No,' he thought, 'though it will make my land lop-sided I must hurry back in a straight line now. I might go too far, and as it is I have a great deal of land.'

So Pahom hurriedly dug a hole, and turned straight towards the hillock.

IX

Pahom went straight towards the hillock, but he now walked with difficulty. He was done up with the heat, his bare feet were cut and bruised, and his legs began to fail. He longed to rest, but it was impossible if he meant to get back before sunset. The sun waits for no man, and it was sinking lower and lower.

'Oh dear,' he thought, 'if only I have not blundered trying for too much! What if I am too late?'

He looked towards the hillock and at the sun. He was still far from his goal, and the sun was already near the rim.

Pahom walked on and on; it was very hard walking, but he went quicker and quicker. He pressed on, but was still far from the place. He began running, threw away his coat, his boots, his flask, and his cap, and kept only the spade which he used as a support.

'What shall I do,' he thought again, 'I have grasped too much, and ruined the whole affair. I can't get there before the sun sets.'

And this fear made him still more breathless. Pahom went on running, his soaking shirt and trousers stuck to him, and his mouth was parched. His breast was working like a blacksmith's bellows, his heart was beating like a hammer, and his legs were giving way as if they did not belong to him. Pahom was seized with terror lest he should die of the strain.

Though afraid of death, he could not stop. 'After having run all that way they will call me a fool if I stop now,' thought he. And he ran on and on, and drew near and heard the Bashkirs yelling and shouting to him, and their cries inflamed his heart still more. He gathered his last strength and ran on.

The sun was close to the rim, and cloaked in mist looked large, and red as blood. Now, yes now, it was about to set! The sun was quite low, but he was also quite near his aim. Pahom could already see the people on the hillock waving their arms to hurry him up. He could see the fox-fur cap on the ground and the money on it, and the Chief sitting on the ground holding his sides. And Pahom remembered his dream.

'There is plenty of land,' thought he, 'but will God let me live on it? I have lost my life; I have lost my life! I shall never reach that spot.'

Pahom looked at the sun, which had reached the earth; one side of it had already disappeared. With all his remaining strength he rushed on, bending his body forward so that his legs

could hardly follow fast enough to keep him from falling. Just as he reached the hillock it suddenly grew dark. He looked up—the sun had already set! He gave a cry: ‘All my labour has been in vain,’ thought he, and was about to stop, but he heard the Bashkirs still shouting, and remembered that though to him from below, the sun seemed to have set, they on the hillock could still see it. He took a long breath and ran up the hillock. It was still light there. He reached the top and saw the cap. Before it sat the Chief laughing and holding his sides. Again Pahom remembered his dream, and he uttered a cry: his legs gave way beneath him, he fell forward and reached the cap with his hands.

‘Ah, that’s a fine fellow!’ exclaimed the Chief. ‘He has gained much land!’

Pahom’s servant came running up and tried to raise him, but he saw that blood was flowing from his mouth. Pahom was dead!

The Bashkirs clicked their tongues to show their pity.

His servant picked up the spade and dug a grave long enough for Pahom to lie in, and buried him in it. Six feet from his head to his heels was all he needed.

VIII

THE DIAMOND NECKLACE

By Guy de Maupassant

Guy de Maupassant: *Henri Rene Albert Guy de Maupassant (1850 1893) the French writer is considered by many to be the greatest of all European short-story writers, standing alone in grace, wit and charm. In his stories he reveals acquaintance with a very wide world teeming with all sorts and types: peasants, aristocrats, school teachers, clerks, lovers, doctors, children, thieves, murderers and lawyers and persons rich and poor. His style conforms consistently to a beautiful, standard of simplicity, sometimes almost childlike, but never superficial. Born in 1850, de Maupassant died in 1893, but in the brief course of forty-three years that he lived, he won the reputation of being the greatest short story writer not only of his time, but perhaps of all time.*

She was one of those pretty and charming girls who, by some freak of destiny, are born into families that have always held subordinate appointments. Possessing neither dowry

nor expectations, she had no hope of meeting some man of wealth and distinction, who would understand her, fall in love with her, and wed her. So she consented to marry a small clerk in the Ministry of Public Instruction.

She dressed plainly, because she could not afford to be elegant, but she felt as unhappy as if she had married beneath her. Women are dependent neither on caste nor ancestry. With them, beauty, grace and charm take the place of birth and breeding. In their case, natural delicacy, instinctive refinement and adaptability constitute their claims to aristocracy and raise girls of the lower classes to an equality with the greatest of great ladies. She was eternally restive under the conviction that she had been born to enjoy every refinement and luxury. Depressed by her humble surroundings, the sordid walls of her dwelling, its worn furniture and shabby hangings were a torment to her. Details which another woman of her class would scarcely have noticed, tortured her and filled her with resentment. The sight of her little Breton maid-of-all-work roused in her forlorn repinings and frantic yearnings. She pictured to herself silent ante-chambers, upholstered with Oriental tapestry, lighted by great bronze standard lamps, while two tall footmen in knee-breeches slumbered in huge arm-chairs, overcome by the oppressive heat from the stove. She dreamed of spacious drawing-rooms with hangings of antique silk, and beautiful tables, laden with

priceless ornaments; of fragrant and coquettish boudoirs, exquisitely adapted for afternoon chats with intimate friends, men of note and distinction, whose attentions are coveted by every woman.

She would sit down to dinner at the round table, its cloth already three days old, while her husband, seated opposite to her, removed the lid from the soup tureen and exclaimed, 'How splendid! My favourite soup!' But her own thoughts were dallying with the idea of exquisite dinners and shining silver, in rooms whose tapestried walls were gay with antique figures and grotesque birds in fairy forests. She would dream of delicious dishes served on wonderful plate, of soft, whispered nothings, which evoke a sphinx-like smile, while one trifles with the pink flesh of a trout or the wing of a plump pullet.

She had no pretty gowns, no jewels, nothing—and yet she cared for nothing else. She felt that it was for such things as these that she had been born. What joy it would have given her to attract, to charm, to be envied by women, courted by men! She had a wealthy friend, who had been at school at the same convent, but after a time she refused to go and see her, because she suffered so acutely after each visit. She spent whole days in tears of grief, regret, despair and misery.

One evening her husband returned home in triumph with a large envelope in his hand.

'Here is something for you,' he cried.

Hastily she tore open the envelope and drew out a printed card with the following inscription:

'The Minister of Public Instruction and Madame George Ramponneau have the honour to request the company of Monsieur and Madame Loisel at an At Home at the Education Office on Monday, January 18th.'

Instead of being delighted, as her husband had hoped, she flung the invitation irritably on the table, exclaiming :

'What good is that to me ?'

'Why, my dear, I thought you would be pleased. You never go anywhere, and this is a really splendid chance for you. I had no end of trouble in getting it. Everybody is trying to get an invitation. It's very select, and only a few invitations are issued to the clerks. You will see all the officials there.'

She looked at him in exasperation, and exclaimed petulantly:

'What do you expect me to wear at a reception like that ?'

He had not considered the matter, but he replied hesitatingly :

'Why, that dress you always wear to the theatre seems to me very nice indeed. . . .'

He broke off. To his horror and consternation he saw that his wife was in tears. Two large drops were rolling slowly down her cheeks.

'What on earth is the matter?' he gasped.

With a violent effort she controlled her emotion, and, drying her wet cheeks, said in a calm voice :

'Nothing. Only I haven't a frock, and so I can't go to the reception. Give your invitation to some friend in your office whose wife is better dressed than I am.'

He was greatly distressed.

'Let us talk it over, Matilda. How much do you think a proper frock would cost, something quite simple that might come in useful for other occasions afterwards?'

She considered the matter for a few moments, busy with her calculations, and wondering how large a sum she might venture to name without shocking the little clerk's instincts of economy and provoking a prompt refusal.

'I hardly know,' she said at last, doubtfully, 'but I think I could manage with four hundred francs.'

He turned a little pale. She had named the exact sum that he had saved for buying a gun and making up Sunday shooting parties the following summer with some friends, who were going to shoot larks in the plain of Nanterre.

But he replied :

'Very well, I'll give you four hundred francs. But mind you buy a really handsome gown.'

The day of the party drew near. But although her gown was finished, Madame Loisel seemed depressed and dissatisfied.

'What is the matter?' asked her husband one evening. 'You haven't been at all yourself the last three days.'

She answered: 'It vexes me to think that I haven't any jewellery to wear, not even a brooch. I shall feel like a perfect pauper. I would almost rather not go to the party.'

'You can wear some fresh flowers. They are very fashionable this year. For ten francs you can get two or three splendid roses.'

She was not convinced.

'No, there is nothing more humiliating than to have an air of poverty among a crowd of rich women.'

'How silly you are!' exclaimed her husband. 'Why don't you ask your friend, Madam Forestier, to lend you some jewellery? You know her quite well enough for that.'

She uttered a cry of joy.

'Yes, of course, it never occurred to me.'

The next day she paid her friend a visit and explained her predicament.

Madame Forestier went to her wardrobe, took out a large jewel-case and placed it open before her friend.

'Help yourself, my dear.'

Madame Loisel saw some bracelets, a pearl necklace, a Venetian cross exquisitely worked

in gold and jewel. She tried on these ornaments in front of the mirror and hesitated, reluctant to take them off and give them back.

‘Have you nothing else?’ she kept asking.

‘O yes, look for yourself. I don’t know what you would prefer.’

At length she discovered a black skin-case containing a superb diamond necklace, and her heart began to beat with frantic desire. With trembling hands she took it out, fastening it over her high-necked gown, and stood gazing at herself in rapture.

Then in an agony of doubt, she said :

‘Will you lend me this? I shouldn’t want anything else.’

‘Yes, certainly.’

She threw her arms round her friend’s neck, kissed her effusively, and then fled with her treasure.

It was the night of reception. Madame Loisel’s triumph was complete. All smiles and graciousness, in her exquisite gown, she was the prettiest woman in the room. Her head was in a whirl of joy. The men stared at her and inquired her name and begged for an introduction, while the junior staff asked her for waltzes. She even attracted the attention of the minister himself.

Carried away by her enjoyment, glorying in her beauty and her success, she threw herself ecstatically into the dance. She moved as in

a beatific dream, wherein were mingled all the homage and admiration she had evoked, all the desires she had kindled, all the complete and perfect triumph so dear to a woman's heart.

It was close on four before she could tear herself away. Ever since midnight her husband had been dozing in a little, deserted drawing-room together with three other men whose wives were enjoying themselves immensely.

He threw her outdoor wraps round her shoulders - unpretentious, everyday garments, whose shabbiness contrasted strangely with the elegance of her ball dress. Conscious of the incongruity, she was eager to be gone, in order to escape the notice of the other women in their luxurious furs. Loisel tried to restrain her.

'Wait here while I fetch a cab. You will catch cold outside.'

But she would not listen to him, and hurried down the staircase. They went out into the street, but there was no cab to be seen. They continued the search, vainly hailing drivers whom they caught sight of in the distance. Shivering with cold and in desperation they made their way towards the Seine. At last, on the quay, they found one of those old vehicles which are only seen in Paris after nightfall, as if ashamed to display their shabbiness by daylight.

The cab took them to their door in the Rue des Martyrs, and they gloomily climbed the stairs to their dwelling. All was over for her. As for him, he was thinking that he would have to be in the office by ten o'clock.

She took off her wraps in front of the mirror, for the sake of one last glance at herself in all her glory. But suddenly she uttered a cry. The diamonds were no longer round her neck.

'What is the matter?' asked her husband who was already half-undressed.

She turned to him in horror. 'I . . . I . . . have lost Madame Forestier's necklace.'

He started in dismay. 'What? Lost the necklace? Impossible.'

They searched the pleats of the gown, the folds of the cloak and all the pockets, but in vain.

'You are sure you had it on when you came away from the ball?

'Yes, I remember feeling it in the lobby at the Education Office.'

'But if you had lost it in the street, we should have heard it drop. It must be in the cab.'

'Yes. I expect it is. Did you take the number?'

'No. Did you?'

'No.'

They gazed at each other, utterly appalled. In the end Loisel put on his clothes again.

'I will go over the ground that we covered on foot and see if I cannot find it.'

He left the house. Lacking the strength to go to bed, unable to think, she collapsed into a chair and remained there in her evening gown, without a fire.

About seven o'clock her husband returned. He had not found the diamonds.

He applied to the police; advertised a reward in the newspapers, made inquiries of all the hackney cab offices; he visited every place that seemed to hold out a vestige of hope.

His wife waited all day long in the same distracted condition, overwhelmed by this appalling calamity.

Loisel returned home in the evening pale and hollow-cheeked. His efforts had been in vain.

'You must write to your friend,' he said, 'and tell her that you have broken the catch of the necklace and that you are having it mended. That will give us time to think things over.'

She wrote a letter to his dictation.

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After a week had elapsed, they gave up all hope. Loisel, who looked five years older, said :

'We must take steps to replace the diamonds.'

On the following day they took the empty case to the jeweller, whose name was inside the lid. He consulted his books.

'The necklace was not bought here, Madam; I can only have supplied the case.'

They went from jeweller to jeweller, in an endeavour to find a necklace, exactly like the one they had lost, comparing their recollections. Both of them were ill with grief and despair.

At last in a shop in the Palais Royal they found a diamond necklace, which seemed to them exactly like the other. Its price was forty thousand francs. The jeweller agreed to sell it to them for thirty-six. They begged him not to dispose of it for three days, and they stipulated for the right to sell it back for thirty-four thousand francs, if the original necklace was found before the end of February.

Loisel had eighteen thousand francs left to him by his father. The balance of the sum he proposed to borrow. He raised loans in all quarters, a thousand francs from one man, five hundred from another, five louis here, three louis there. He gave promissory notes, agreed to exorbitant terms, had dealings with usurers, and with all the money-lending hordes. He compromised his whole future, and had to risk his signature, hardly knowing if he would be able to honour it. Overwhelmed by the prospect of future suffering, the black misery which was about to come upon him, the physical privations and moral torments, he went to

fetch the new necklace, and laid his thirty-six thousand francs down on the jeweller's counter.

When Madame Loisel brought back the necklace, Madame Forestier said reproachfully :

'You ought to have returned it sooner ; I might have wanted to wear it.'

To Madame Loisel's relief she did not open the case. Supposing she had noticed the exchange, what would she have thought ? What would she have said ? Perhaps she would have taken her for a thief.

* * * *

Madame Loisel now became acquainted with the horrors of extreme poverty. She made up her mind to it, and played her part heroically. This appalling debt had to be paid, and pay it she would. The maid was dismissed ; the flat was given up, and they moved to a garret. She undertook all the rough household work and the odious duties of the kitchen. She washed up after meals and ruined her pink finger-nails scrubbing greasy dishes and sauce-pans. She washed the linen, the shirts and the dusters, and hung them out on the line to dry. Every morning she carried down the sweepings to the street, and brought up the water pausing for breath at each landing. Dressed like a working woman, she went with her basket on her arm to the greengrocer, the grocer and the butcher, bargaining, wrangling and fighting for every farthing.

Each month some of the promissory notes had to be redeemed, and others renewed in order to gain time.

Her husband spent his evenings working at some tradesman's accounts, and at night he would often copy papers at five sous a page.

This existence went on for ten years.

At the end of that time they had paid off everything to the last penny, including the usurious rates and the accumulations of interest.

Madame Loisel now looked an old woman. She had become the typical poor man's wife, rough, coarse, hard-bitten. Her hair was neglected, her skirts hung awry; and her hands were red. Her voice was no longer gentle, and she washed down the floors vigorously. But now and then, when her husband was at the office, she would sit by the window, and her thoughts would wander back to that far-away evening, the evening of her beauty and her triumph.

What would have been the end of it, if she had not lost the necklace? Who could say? Who could say? How strange, how variable are the chances of life! How small a thing can serve to save or ruin you!

One Sunday she went for a stroll in the Champs Elysees, for the sake of relaxation after the week's work, and she caught sight of a lady with a child. She recognized Madame Forestier who looked as young, as pretty, and as

attractive as ever. Madame Loisel felt a thrill of emotion. Should she speak to her? Why not? Now that the debt was paid, why should she not tell her the whole story? She went up to her.

“Good morning, Jeanne.”

Her friend did not recognize her and was surprised at being addressed so familiarly by this homely person.

‘I am afraid I do not know you—you must have made a mistake,’ she said hesitatingly.

‘No, I am Matilda Loisel.’

‘O my poor, dear Matilda, how you have changed!’

‘Yes, I have been through a very hard time since I saw you last; no end of trouble, and all through you.’

‘Through me? What do you mean?’

‘You remember the diamond necklace you lent me to wear at the reception at the Education Office?’

‘Yes. Well?’

‘Well, I lost it.’

‘I don’t understand; you brought it back to me.’

‘What I brought to you was another one, exactly like it. And for the last ten years we have been paying for it. You will understand that it was not an easy matter for people like

us, who hadn't a penny. However, it's all over now. I can't tell you what a relief it is.'

Madame Forestier stopped dead.

'You mean to say that you bought a diamond necklace to replace mine?'

'Yes. And you never noticed it? They were certainly very much alike.'

She smiled with ingenuous pride and satisfaction.

Madame Forestier seized both her hands in great distress.

'O my poor, dear Matilda. Why, mine were only imitation. At the most they were worth five hundred francs!'

IX

THE TELL-TALE HEART

(By Edgar Allan Poe)

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849). *Perhaps the greatest of American writers of short stories was born in Boston in 1809. Child of actor-parents who left him an orphan in earliest youth, he was adopted by John Allan of Richmond, Virginia. He started his career as a poet, and then took to writing short-stories, and he was hailed as a great writer as soon as his "Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque" was published. His short life was marked by several unhappy love-affairs, despair and ill-health brought on by excesses of drink, and an attempt at suicide. Poe was a pioneer, and he may be even called one of the inventors of the modern detective and mystery story. His most famous stories are "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Mystery of Marie Roget" and "The Purloined Letter."*

True!—nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses—not destroyed—not dulled them.

Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily-how calmly-I can tell you the whole story.

It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain, but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold, and so by degrees—very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye for ever.

Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen *me*. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution—with what foresight—with what dissimulation I went to work! I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him. And every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it—oh, so gently! And then, when I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in a dark lantern, all closed, closed, so that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head. Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I

thrust it in ! I moved it slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man's sleep. It took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed. Ha!—would a madman have been so wise as this? And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern, cautiously—oh so cautiously—cautiously (for the hinges creaked) I undid it just so much that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye. And this I did for seven long nights—every night just at midnight—but I found the eye always closed; and so it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man, who vexed me, but this Evil Eye. And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he had passed the night. So you see he would have been a very profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he slept

Upon the eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door. A watch's minute hand moves more quickly than did mine. Never before that night had I *felt* the extent of my own powers—of my sagacity. I could scarcely contain my feelings of triumph. To think that there I was, opening the door, little by little, and he not even to dream of my secret deeds or thoughts. I fairly chuckled at the idea; and perhaps he heard me—for he moved on the bed suddenly as if he started.

Now you may think that I drew back—but no. His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness (for the shutters were close-fastened, through fear of robbers), and so I knew that he could not see the opening of the door, and I kept pushing it on steadily, steadily.

I had my head in, and was about to open the lantern, when my thumb slipped upon the tin fastening, and the old man sprang up in the bed, crying out, "Who's there?"

I kept quite still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down. He was still sitting up in the bed, listening—just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death-watches in the wall.

Presently I heard a groan, and I knew it has the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief—oh, no!—it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed. His fears had been ever since growing upon him. He had been trying to fancy them causeless, but could not. He had been saying to himself,

"It is nothing but the wind in the chimney—it is only a mouse crossing the floor," or, "It is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp." Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions; but he had found all in vain. *All in vain*; because Death, in approaching him, had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim. And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel—although he neither saw nor heard—to *feel* the presence of my head within the room.

When I had waited a long time, very patiently, without hearing him lie down, I resolved to open a little—a very, very little crevice in the lantern. So I opened it—you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily—until, at length, a single dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and fell upon the vulture eye.

It was open—wide, wide, open—and I grew furious as I gazed upon it. I saw it with perfect distinctness—all a dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones; but I could see nothing else of the old man's face or person, for I had directed the ray, as if by instinct, precisely upon the damned spot.

And now have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but over-acuteness of the senses?—now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew

that sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man's heart. It increased my fury as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage.

But even yet I refrained and kept still. I scarcely breathed. I held the lantern motionless. I tried how steadily I could maintain the ray upon the eye. Meantime the hellish tattoo of the heart increased. It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant. The old man's terror *must* have been extreme! It grew louder, I say, louder every moment!—do you mark me well? I have told you that I am nervous: so I am. And now, at the dead hour of the night, amid the dreadful silence of that old house, so strange a noise as this excited me to uncontrollable terror. Yet, for some minutes longer, I refrained and stood still. But the beating grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must burst. And now a new anxiety seized me—the sound would be heard by a neighbour! The old man's hour had come! With a loud yell I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room. He shrieked once—once only. In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. I then smiled gaily, to find the deed so far done. But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound. This, however, did not vex me; it would not be heard through the wall. At length it ceased. The old man was dead. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. Yes; he was stone, stone dead. I placed my hand upon the heart

and held it there many minutes. There was no pulsation. He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more.

If still you think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs.

I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye—not even *his*—could have detected anything wrong. There was nothing to wash out—no stain of any kind no blood-spot whatever. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught all—ha! ha!

When I had made an end of these labours, it was four o'clock—still dark as midnight. As the bell sounded the hour, there came a knocking at the street door. I went down to open it with a light heart—for what had I *now* to fear? There entered three men, who introduced themselves, with perfect suavity, as officers of the police. A shriek had been heard by a neighbour during the night; suspicion of foul play had been aroused; information had been lodged at the police office, and they (the officers) had been deputed to search the premises.

I smiled—for *what* had I to fear? I bade the gentlemen welcome. The shriek, I said, was my own in a dream. The old man, I mentioned, was absent in a country. I took my visitors all over the house. I bade them search—search *well*. I led them, at length to *his* chamber. I showed them his treasures, secure, undisturbed. In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I brought chairs into the room, and desired them *here* to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim.

The officers were satisfied. My manner had convinced them. I was singularly at ease. They sat, and while I answered cheerily, they chatted of familiar things. But ere long I felt myself getting pale, and wished them gone. My head ached, and I fancied a ringing in my ears; but still they sat and still chatted. The ringing became more distinct—It continued and became more distinct. I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling; but it continued and gained definitiveness—until, at length, I found that the noise was *not* within my ears.

No doubt I now grew more pale; but I talked more fluently, and with a heightened voice. Yet the sound increased—and what could I do? It was a *low, dull, quick sound—such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton*. I gasped for breath—and yet the

officers heard it not. I talked more quickly—vehemently ; but the noise steadily increased. I arose and argued about trifles ; in a high key and with violent gesticulation ; but the noise steadily increased. Why *would* they not be gone ? I paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observations of the men—but the noise steadily increased. O God ! what *could* I do ? I foamed—I raved—I swore ! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting, and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose above all and continually increased. It grew louder—louder—*louder* ! And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not ? Almighty God !—no, no ! They heard !—they suspected !—they *know* ! they were making a mockery of my horror !—this I thought, and this I think. But anything was better than this agony ! Anything was more tolerable than this derision ! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer ! I felt that I must scream or die !—and now—again ! hark ! louder ! louder ! *louder* !—

“Villains !” I shrieked, “dissemble no more ! I admit the deed !—tear up the planks !—here, here !—it is the beating of his hideous heart !”

NOTES

1. THE HOME-COMING

Ring leader—here leader of a gang of mischievous boys. Note the difference between “leader” and “ringleader.”

mud-flat—low-lying flat sheet of mud.

unanimously—with one voice.

Second—support.

Sauntered up—walked up in a leisurely manner.

unconcerned—not interested

meditation—to think over.

futility—uselessness.

He appeared like a young philosopher meditating on futility of games—a philosopher is one who thinks deeply. He is not disturbed by what happens around him. Makhan seated on the log was unmindful of what the other boys were saying. He appeared to be thinking that the games were something useless.

thrash—beat.

Regal dignity—why regal ? Regal means royal, kingly. Phatik was to his friends what a king is to his subjects. His order was always carried out.

crisis—a difficult and critical situation.

fertile brain—a brain which can think of new ideas quickly.

seize upon a manoeuvre—think of a clever trick.

discomfit—Look up the dictionary and note the difference in meaning between “discomfit ” and “defeat.”

Mother Earth—why is Earth called mother ? Note the Hindi equivalent, “Dharti mata.”

Blind as Fate—Fate is the goddess ruling the destiny of man. Why blind ?—because to us it appears

to work in its own peculiar manner, without making any distinction between the virtuous and the wicked, the rich and the poor, the old and the young.

The Furies—snake-haired goddesses of Greek mythology, who punished crime.

Barge—a broad boat.

impotent—powerless.

Sheepish—timid.

Perpetual nuisance—a source of constant trouble.

Prejudice—a feeling against.

No love was lost between the two brothers—since Phatik and Makhan did not love each other, their separation caused no loss of love.

Was on pins and needles—in a state of excitement.

Bequeath—to leave by making a will.

Bequeathed in perpetuity—gave Makhan “his fishing rod, his big kite, and his marbles” for good.

indiscretion—an unwise act.

Craves for recognition—longs for regard.

Anguish—severe pain of body or mind.

slighted—not treated with courtesy.

despot—an absolute monarch.

wistfulness—sadness.

instinct—a natural tendency.

uncouth—clumsy.

espied—saw.

to summon up—call into play.

to jeer at—to sneer at.

country lout—an awkward village lad.

delirious—suffering from delirium—a temporary madness.

fathom—a measure of six feet meant for measuring the depth of water.

Plumbing an unfathomable sea—sounding the depth of a deep sea. Here the suggestion is to the coming close of his life.

2. THE LOST CHILD

alleys—narrow passages.

emerged—came out.

warren—a place for breeding rabbits.

sped—moved quickly.

brimming over with life and laughter—happy and lively.

receding toys—toys which appeared to be moving away

cold stare of refusal—the unfeeling way they looked while they rejected the request of the child to have a toy.

tyrant's way—the manner in which a cruel person behaves

quelled—put down.

pouting sob—indicates the way a child purses his lips in a sulky manner.

to wend—to go

eddy—here the whirl of wind.

tributary streams—little streams falling into the main stream.

mirage—an illusion of the eye.

put into relief—its effect brought prominently out.

weird—something mysterious, unearthly.

Siva's laughter—Siva is one of the gods of Hindu Triad (*Trimurti*), the other two being Brahma and Vishnu. Siva is the Destroyer, Brahma the "Creator," and Vishnu the "Preserver."

saturated with—full of.

Prancing like a colt—jumping like the young one of a horse.

chiming with the fitful gust of wind—moving in harmony with the wind that blew at intervals.

a dragon-fly—a fly with a long body and shining colours.

evaded capture—avoided being arrested.

whining—crying in a monotonous manner.

adoration—worship.

chaperon—a hood ; a covering.

pollen—a delicate sort of powder found on flowers.

wafted aloft—carried high up.

released their pent-up souls—the note of the koel gave expression to their feelings.

caper—jump.

throngs—crowds.

fascinated—attracted.

heeded—cared for.

hawked—shouted his wares.

implacable—strong, overpowering.

languid—moving very slowly.

over-whelming desire—strong desire.

graceful bend—beautiful curve.

invisible—which cannot be seen.

miniature waterfall—waterfall of small size.

Coarse Music—music which is not very pleasant.

round-about—merry-go-round.

in full swing—moving with full speed.

shrieked with dizzy laughter—cried and laughed to such an extent as to make them feel giddy.

half parted in amaze—half parted in a feeling of wonder.

rapt—completely absorbed.

anticipated sensation—expected feeling.

eternal denial—constant refusal.

convulsed—contracted with fear

panic-stricken—full of fear.

aft behind.

congested—crowded.

hafty shoulders—heavy shoulders.

at the highest pitch of his voice—loudly.

disconsolate find—disconsolate means full of sorrow ;
“find” here refers to the child.

3. THE LETTER

glowed—shone.

nearing its close—coming to an end.

to shield—to protect.

The sound of grinding mills and the sweet voices of women singing : In Indian villages and small towns, women belonging to a family rise early in the morning and grind corn in small stone-mills worked by hand. They sing at their work. The monotonous sound of the mills mingled with their pleasing song calls up a delightful picture of early morning.

screech—cry

sway—rule ; control.

as a false friend lulls his chosen victim with caressing smiles — caressing smiles are smiles which indicate love. Here, since the friend is false, the smiles are showy, insincere. Note this powerful simile.

crevices— narrow openings.

goal—the end.

flinging—throwing.

gratitude—thankfulness.

worries—bothers.

potion—dose.

The poor bird was as good as in his bag—Ali was a sure shot. The mere sight of the partridge (*Titar* in Hindi) meant that he would be able to shoot it successfully.

scrub--here a stunted bush.

eagle eyes—eyes as keen as those of an eagle; the eagle is noted for its keenness of vision.

the evening of his life—old age.

dragged on a cheerless existence—was passing his days without feeling any joy.

bewildered terror—a feeling of confusion and fear.

bereft—deprived.

The hunter's instinct was in his very blood and bones—The hunting tendency had become a part of his character.

serenity—calmness.

to make game of him—to treat him as an object of joke.

scandal—disgraceful talk against one's reputation.

sad and inexpressive—cheerless and dull.

shimmer of animation—faint light showing life.

Vishnu—a god worshipped by Hindus, the "Preserver" of humanity. The other two of this group are Brahma, the Creator, and Shiva, the Destroyer.

customary—usual.

relic—a memorial of past times.

a bit touched—slightly mad.

some sacred precinct—some holy place.

chimed in—spoke in agreement.

declaiming—reciting with proper tone and gesture.

lunacy—madness.

indifferent verse—verse not possessing much merit.

pest—a plague ; here a troublesome person.

was not worth a pie—had no meaning.

suspense—a feeling of uncertainty and anxiety.

bewildered—astonished and confused.

deftly—cleverly.

remorse—the pain caused by a feeling of guilt.

“Sigri”—a pot containing live charcoals to warm yourself in winter.

4. RESIGNATION

to torment him—to cause him pain.

penance—hard life.

paragon of patience—person possessing patience of a very high order.

personification of loyalty—a model of faithfulness.

fortune never smiles on him—good luck never favours him.

monotony—dullness.

this dumb species of humanity—here refers to the family of clerks, who suffer insults silently.

pepper-and-salt—his hair was black and grey, mixed.

scrubbing—cleansing.

forty winks—short sleep.

lentil porridge—a kind of pudding.

looked daggers—with anger in her eyes.

a paan—a green leaf for chewing.

swearing—abusing and cursing.

clammy—sticky.

bullyingly—in a threatening manner.

snapped at him—spoke to him sharply.

brandished—waved.

hold your ears—it is a form of punishment to ask a person to hold his ears

as if he were swallowing blood—doing something extremely distasteful.

howled—shouted angrily.

took to his heels—ran away.

insubordinate—disobedient.

indignity—insult.

unwarranted humiliation—uncalled-for insult.

had put chains on his feet—as he was thinking of the insult he had suffered he could not walk quickly.

give him a piece of his mind—to inflict a rebuke in a frank way.

cringing with fright—submissive with fear.

stunned—shocked.

diplomatic—artful and clever.

humiliating ritual—a ceremony (i.e., holding of ears) which will lower him in the eyes of others.

5. THE MUSCULAR SON-IN-LAW

flopped—fell into the chair.

Mej di—sister-in-law.

A score to settle with—to hit back on account of some previous insulting remark or practical joke.

sarcastic—biting, ironical.

the home of sloth his frame—“Sloth” means laziness. Nalini was heavy of body. This remark is a dig at him for his bulk and laziness.

the slur—the blot; here it refers to his shortcoming i.e., the heaviness of his body.

scouring—cleansing.

a game of dice—a game in which points are counted by throwing small cubes. Its Hindi equivalent is 'chaupar' or "chausar."

Jamai Babu—"Jamai" is a word used in common talk for son-in-law.

a voice that rent the skies—loud voice.

impostor—a person who practises fraud.

non-plussed—completely puzzled.

dissolved—disappeared.

pound his bones to powder—crush him.

at their wits' end—not knowing what to do.

flared up—became suddenly angry.

allude—refer.

6. THE HALF-BROTHERS

There are two Prestons in this touching story—the elder Preston is the head of a family. He marries a widow, named Helen, who has a son, Gregory, by her first husband. The younger Preston is the son of the elder Preston and Helen. Thus Gregory and the younger Preston are half-brothers.

My mother was twice married—Note that the story is told by the younger Preston in the first person.

Cumberland—name of a country to the north west of England.

man and wife—"man" here means husband.

lease—a contract by which land is used for some time by a tenant for a rent.

stock—live-stock, animals on a farm.

to make every penny... go as far as possible—to spend the little amount of money they had, economically, with great care.

cup—of her miseries ; her troubles.

Scarlet fever—"Scarlet" is a bright-red colour. Scarlet fever is an infectious fever, causing red spots to appear on the body of the person who suffers from it.

wee—tiny

lassie—a little girl.

the little black train of people—the mourners, wearing black clothes, forming the funeral procession.

fain—only too glad.

towards the keep of herself—towards maintaining herself.

turned him sour—gave him a feeling of bitterness.

without—naughtiness ; encouraged in his naughtiness by his own wife.

Would have coined his heart's blood to save her—would have been prepared for any sacrifice—even of his own life—to save her.

flesh and blood—relation.

alienation—separation.

in the bond—was one of the conditions of marriage.

lumpish—heavy and awkward.

loutish—somewhat clumsy.

meddled in—interfered with.

rated—rebuked.

scouted—treated him badly.

disparaging words—showing condemnation.

the cock of the school—a strong and over-powering boy at the school.

good parts—good qualities.

The Fells—the name of a mountainous part of the country in the North of England.

weird—strange, mysterious.

wotted—knew ; past tense of wot (to know), a word no longer in use.

The mocking spirits of the Fells—the travellers passing through these hills cry out for help. Their cries resound and set up echoes. The superstitious people regard these echoes as the jeering replies of evil spirits haunting these places.

jowted—cried ; howled.

collie—the dog kept by a shepherd.

apprehensive—full of fear.

maud—a loose woollen garment worn by a Scottish shepherd.

gait homewards—way of walking towards home.

dogged—determined.

belike—perhaps.

The whole strength of the farm—all the persons available on the farm.

plaid—an outer woollen garment worn by a Highlander.

7. HOW MUCH LAND DOES A MAN NEED ?

Promenades—wide streets or pavements where people go out for a walk.

piqued—offended.

disparaged—talked slightly.

The Evil one—the devil.

Commune—a community or a corporation ; like a “panchayat.”

rouble—a Russian coin.

cut down five young lime trees—this was done to harm Pahom. The farmer wanted to take revenge.

I will pay him out—take revenge.

racked his brains—thought over the problem vigorously.

Elder—an old, wise man Member of a governing body or class.

grease your palms—offer you something as bribe.

the Volga—a long and important river in Russia.

Freehold—under freehold you own land, so that you do not pay any rent. It is not a lease.

arable—fit for ploughing.

virgin soil—soil which has never been tilled.

fallow land—land left untilled.

prairie—a tract of level grass land.

clinched the matter—closed the deal; struck the bargain.

Bashkirs—inhabitants of Bashkiria (a part of Russia).

Steppes—a vast plain of Siberia (Russia), They have covered with grass of their own.

Kumiss—an intoxicating drink made of the fermented milk of mares.

tethered—tied.

knew no Russian—did not know how to use the Russian language.

scribe—an official writer.

reckon it out—measure it

prostrate—lying flat.

done up—completely exhausted.

Six feet.....needed—just the length required for a person to lie in his grave.

Note the result of Pahom's greed for land.

8. THE DIAMOND NECKLACE

instinctive refinement—manner showing natural politeness and intelligence.

aristocracy—refers to the qualities which raise them to a higher level.

Women belong to a higher or a lower class not by birth, but by their wit, refinement and beauty. Even a poor lady may have infinite charm and thus belong to a higher class.

Bretton—an inhabitant of Brittany (France).

boudoir—the private room of a lady.

tureen—a dish for holding soup.

Sphinx—A monster with the head of a woman and the body of a lioness. She proposed riddles to travellers, and killed those who could not solve them. The smile of the Sphinx means a mysterious smile, the meaning of which one cannot understand.

petulantly—with a feeling of irritation.

predicament—a difficult situation.

waltz—a ball-room dance.

beatific—happy, blessed.

incongruity—inconsistency.

no vestige of hope—no trace; no sign.

usurious rate—very high rate (of interest).

Champs-Elyses—a famous French promenade (a place for walk and enjoyment).

9 THE TELL-TALE HEART

hearken—listen.

dissimulation—hiding under false appearances.

undid—opened.

this evil eye—referring to the vulture eye.

sagacity—wisdom.

chuckled—chuckle is a peculiar kind of laugh.

pitch—a black substance formed of tar.

groan—cry.

chilled the very marrow in my bones—gave me a keen sense of terror.

the damned spot—the cursed place. Here the reference is to the “vulture” eye.

the hellish tatto—the noisy beat of the heart.

yell—cry.

scantlings—here pieces of the planks.

in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph—in the confidence of the feeling that I had cleverly evaded detection.

in a high key—in a loud manner.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. You had had an unhappy experience of a snow-fall. Describe this experience.
2. You visit a friend's house, where you are treated as an unwelcome guest. Describe your feelings.
3. You are anxiously waiting for news of your brother, who has been reported to be ill. Write a dialogue between your sister and yourself about it.
4. Give an imaginary description of a bad dream you might have dreamt.
5. Describe an incident in which you have mistaken a person for your friend.
6. Bring out the moral of the story "How Much Land Does a Man Need?"
7. Write a dialogue between Matilda and her husband on the discovery that Madam Forestier's jewels were false.
8. A mother has lost a child in a fair. Describe the mother's search for the child.
9. Suppose you had an interview with your officer who offered you insult. Write a letter to your father asking for his permission to resign your post.

